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A northern highway of the Tsar

Aubyn Trevor-Battye

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BY THE SAME AUTHOR
SECOND EDITION

Ice-bound on Kolguev

A Chapter in the Exploration of
Arctic Europe, to which is added
a record of the Natural History
of the Island

By

AUBYN TREVOR-BATTYE

B.A., Oxford, Fellow of the Linnæan
Society, Fellow of the Royal Geo-
graphical Society, Fellow of the
Zoological Society, Member of the
British Ornithologists' Union

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A Northern Highway of the Tsar



The Author

Lemarcioravure

Printed in Paris

Western Highway of the West



THE
WESTERN HIGHWAY
OF THE WEST
AND THE
SOUTHERN HIGHWAY

6

A Northern Highway of The Tsar

BY
AUBYN TREVOR-BATTYE
AUTHOR OF "ICE-BOUND ON KOLGUEV"



"SAILOR."

WITH MAP
AND ILLUSTRATED BY THE AUTHOR

EDITION IMPORTED BY
NEW AMSTERDAM BOOK COMPANY
156 FIFTH AVENUE, : NEW YORK

156 FIFTH AVENUE, NEW YORK
NEW AMSTERDAM BOOK COMPANY
Edition Imported by

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WITH MAP
AND ILLUSTRATED BY THE AUTHOR

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PREFACE

SOME of the critics who reviewed *Ice-bound on Kolguev* were so kind as to express a wish that the author would write a sequel describing his subsequent journey through the tundras and forests of high Northern Russia, and many friends demanded the same. The latter was as pleasing an encouragement as the other a pleasing surprise. Yet succeeding travels and much occupation have made it difficult before this to put into a readable form the events recorded in the diary of that journey. One word, therefore, about this account.

There are five seasons in the year in

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Northern Russia—our four, and a fifth, Rasputnya by name. Rasputnya means literally “the parting of the ways,” and is used for a period between autumn and winter. Travelling by one of the high northern trails is easy enough in summer when the ground is dry and firm, is delightful in winter when the sleighs glide over the snow, and over the ice of lake or river; but in Rasputnya it is not easy, it is very difficult, and no one dreams of moving then. It is freezing one day and thawing the next, the ice-charged rivers are dangerous for boats, and all the land is morass and swamp. During the whole of October the Government postal service is stopped, labour contracts are off, and the keepers of the stages are entirely freed from their usual obligation to supply the traveller with horses or sleighs. This explains why, when an inquiry as to my

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whereabouts was made from England, the inevitable answer came that no news could arrive "till the swamps were frozen up." Certainly no Russian could imagine any person rash enough to try and travel then. But an Englishman is proverbially obstinate; and meantime, through these swamps I was pushing on inch by inch by various shifts and devices. It is of these that the story tells.

The experience taught me more of the Russian peasant's character than could possibly have been learnt under more favourable chances of travel. If the reader will bear in mind that I was travelling in defiance of all tradition, custom, and common sense, and that not one of those I met was under any *compulsion* to lend me a hand, he will then see how good, on the whole, are the qualities to be found even among this far-away, isolated

PREFACE

peasantry. Of the Russian *officials* I need not speak. They were, as I have always found them, kindness, courtesy, and even generosity itself.

I hope this little book will not be found uninteresting; it rests its claims on Rasputnya, and on Rasputnya alone.

As is well known, the late Emperor Alexander III. always had much at heart the welfare of the wild region here described; there is, therefore, a double interest in the acceptance of the dedication of this book by His Imperial Majesty the Emperor Nicholas.

It would ill become me not to add, under a loyal sense of a characteristic kindness, that this honour is directly due to the personal intervention of His Royal Highness the Duke of York.

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NOTE

IN preparing the accompanying Map of the river system of North West Russia, I have thought it better to omit all but the more important names. The names of the various small tributaries referred to in the account would only spoil the clearness of the plan, and the same may be said of stopping-places. For the same reason I have omitted the ranges of hills. These are very low at the highest. The smaller rivers generally rise in swamp or low-lying lakes.

It is always difficult to know whether to spell proper names as they sound to English ears, or correctly. Thus no traveller would recognise in Askinö a village universally called "Okshin" by the people there; yet the former is correct. But, on the whole, it has seemed best to keep as near the Russian as may be; and I am indebted to my friend, Mr. Brayley Hodgetts, an accomplished Russian scholar, for kindly overhauling my Russian names.

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CHAPTER I

THE BELL-SHAPED GULF

IT is now two years since I put down my pen, having finished an account of a considerable stay on the island of Kolguev, which is situated in that part of the Arctic Ocean known as Barent's Sea. My sojourn there, though happy enough, had been enforced by the set of the ice-pack, which made it quite impossible for a ship to reach the island. I had two English companions: the first my camp man, Thomas Hyland; the other a faithful old spaniel dog, by name Sailor. Poor dear old Sailor! death has removed him since then to other hunting grounds,—whether happier or not, I do not know. I doubt it; for he was a true philosopher, and of so enviable a disposition that nothing came to him amiss.

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Whether the island was inhabited or uninhabited had been very doubtful until this visit; but I found Samoyeds there, with their wives and children,—fifty-nine souls in all. They tended reindeer, hunted such sea-bears as came in winter, seals also, and an occasional walrus, and killed many thousands of wild geese. These they salted for winter food. They dwelt in movable wigwams, which they called *mya*, but which are better known to us by the Russian name, *choom*.

Living thus with them, sharing their dwellings, their food and their pursuits, I became much attached to these simple people, and left them with many regrets. For, when the ice at length moved away, two Russians—traders in a small way—visited the island in their wooden craft. The secret of the existence of Samoyeds on Kolguev had been so well kept by these men that it was unknown even to the sharp intelligence of the Russian officials. The name of one of these traders was Alexander, of the other Alexis; the surname of either

THE BELL-SHAPED GULF

was Samarokoff, and they were cousins. Alexis' boat was called the *Michael*, Alexander's the *Alexander*. It was on board this latter that we left Kolguev. The crews were formed of Samoyeds, but each trader acted as skipper of his boat, and had a Russian henchman with him; attached to Alexander was Yakoff Popoff, an ex-soldier, —to Alexis, Vasili Popoff, who was also mayor-elect of his native village.

Samoyeds are very superstitious, and the northern peasantry are little behind them in this respect; and of the Samoyeds on board one of the more notable figures, Onaska, was credited with a sort of prophetic power, and another, Timafè, was a weird person versed in omens.

The time is September. We have just crossed, in a very severe gale, the sea that lies between Kolguev and the mainland, and are now seeking some possible harbour. The boat is laden with a hundred barrels of salted reindeer flesh and hides, and salted geese, obtained in Kolguev.

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Alexander's home was at Askino [pronounced by these peasants Okshin], a little village on the Pechora. But because of most tempestuous weather, we were unable to run into the entry of that great river, which is badly locked by sandbars. There was a second harbour known to Alexander, behind Sengeiskii Island, where he had often been before. But the weather was too bad for this, so we ran past it before the gale. Eventually we succeeded in entering a gulf called the Kolokolkova Gulf (*i.e.* the Bell-shaped Gulf), and after six hard days of warping the boat in the teeth of the gale in that shallow estuary, we came to an anchor under a bank, on the top of which was a Samoyed's *choom* (or wigwam).

Now no Englishman but myself has been, so far as I can ascertain, on this spot, nor has made the journey thence to the great Pechora River.

The Kolokolkova Gulf is the shallow tidal estuary of two small rivers—the Kolokolkova and the Kambalnitza. They are

THE BELL-SHAPED GULF

not large, nor very productive of fish ; but for all that this estuary, as a good sealing ground, is a considerable focus of Samoyed life.

Alexander the Russian did not like being here. He had never been here before. For thirty-five years he had made the crossing to Kolguev and back for the reindeer skins and the oil of seals, and always he had managed hitherto to run into the mouth of the Pechora itself, or to find a shelter behind Sengeiskii Island. He liked this better of the two, for the Pechora entry is not easy, and navigation up the river was far more difficult for his rough, flat-bottomed boat than navigation down. From the Timanskii Schar (as the water behind the island is called) he also had a good track home, and, laying up his boat under shelter of the island, could easily rejoin her after the winter broke up. But now he was as lost as a bagged hare in a strange country, where, instead of the well-beaten runs of itself and its fellows across the downlands,

A NORTHERN HIGHWAY OF THE TSAR

there is only a maze of uncertain tracks by which the rabbits go to feed.

The occupant of the little *choom* on shore proved to be one Pronia, a young Samoyed, who soon came off to us in a boat, and guided us through a difficult tideway to the shore. He told us that a few sleigh-marks which we saw were only made by a chance sealing Samoyed, and led nowhere; and that we should not find reindeer at all on this side of the gulf.

The significance of this information will be understood when I say that the voyager who is cast on these desolate shores is little likely to see civilization again unless, by the favour of fortune, he falls in with some of the wandering Samoyeds, ready to help him with their reindeer sleighs. But just as a man dropped into the desert from a balloon may strike a caravan route, so had we in a sense; because we were encamped by a tidal estuary, and to such spots these natives are wont to come for fishing and sealing.

Pronia said he had no reindeer of his

THE BELL-SHAPED GULF

own ; that he had spent much of the summer round this gulf catching fish ; but that if we would cross the gulf in the boats, we should probably fall in with some reindeer Samoyeds, and could borrow their sleighs, and so reach the Pechora.

This Pronia was an exceedingly nice young fellow, with charmingly frank manners. He spoke much better Russian than our Kolguev Samoyeds ; or, at any rate, I could understand him better. He was perpetually asking questions, and learnt all the English he possibly could from us. He would indicate each thing in turn and give its Samoyed name twice in the Russian way, and then end with, "With you what?" Thus he would point to one of his dead seals and say, "*Nierpi* in the Samoyed ; in the Samoyed *nierpi*. With you what?" Having in this way got the name, he would walk round repeating it to himself, correcting his own pronunciation. "Sierrl, no—siul, no—seal ; seal, seal, seal. Yes, yes, good. *Seal*."

A NORTHERN HIGHWAY OF THE TSAR

Alexander would have set sail and run away for Timanskii Schar, but the wind still held strongly right into the entry, and it was foggy along the land. It was therefore reluctantly decided to unload the boats at this point, and stow the things on shore. So the boom was used as a derrick, and the barrels were brought out of the hold. Each of the boats held a cargo of a hundred barrels, containing salted reindeer flesh. This meat, obtained from the reindeer killed on Kolguev, was destined to be sold, and eventually to find a market in the towns of Russia. The two boats lay then within a few feet of one another, and almost dry when the tide was out; and all day long, in that strange solitude, the work went on.

The nearest settlement was a hundred miles away, where the little village of Askino lay on the Pechora. We were now between the wilderness and the sea; on one side the monotony of the shallow gulf, on the other sandhills and maram grasses and the waste of bog and willow scrub—in

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short, the typical tundra. The five Samoyeds who had formed our crew threw themselves heart and soul into the work of unloading; indeed, when I saw the cheerfulness, perseverance, and skill they brought to the task, I was full of admiration for these little Arctic men: for the Samoyed, though less diminutive than the Eskimo, is still small in stature.

The weather was really pretty miserable, for a cutting north wind came over the sea, and a fine blizzard-snow kept driving. Pronia had had bad luck, and had secured but three seals, on one of which the dogs had gorged themselves the night before. Our old spaniel Sailor, I was relieved to find, did not care for seal-meat. As there was little else to be done, I thought I might as well go and try my luck with the seals. At the eastern point of the entrance to the gulf a spit of sand ran out into the waters, and here Pronia's seals had landed. When a Samoyed goes sealing, he simply chooses a favourable spot, loads his rifle, and, fixing a

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forked stick in the ground before him, squats down to wait. He has no need to conceal himself, for the resemblance of his old skin garments to the mud about him is concealment sufficient in itself. And the seals swim by in the sea, and raise themselves quite high in the water to look at this new thing. They try to smell it, but cannot, for the wind sets wrongly, the hunter having of course taken care that the wind shall blow in his face. And at last they determine that it is just a new lump of mud, or perhaps a bit of a dead whale, or a boulder tumbled out of a cliff. And one of them, grown more brave, comes nearer and nearer in, till at last he lies there on the sand, winking sleepy eyes at the low sunbeams, with the hissing wash of the tiniest wavelets just lapping about his flippers. Then, but not till then, the Samoyed—who well knows the great value of every shot—stealthily lays his old flint-lock in the forked stick, and, looking very deliberately along the barrels, pulls. The shot fired, in a moment the motionless,

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mud-coloured lump is all alive; it has picked up a little harpoon, with its coil of sealskin rope, and running across the sand-bank has driven the weapon home. Roll and plunge now as it may, the victim is secured. Never again will this poor seal follow the salmon as they run up into the rivers, or hunt the ducks among the ice-floes that come from the Polar Seas.

Taking Hyland with me, I followed the coast along till we came to Pronia's sand-spit, and here I chose, as I supposed, admirable positions where one or the other must certainly get a shot. But to no purpose. Although we knelt there motionless for the best part of two hours, we had no luck. Now and then a seal would come and show his dark head above the waves, but not one came near enough for a shot.

Seals, like antelopes, are inquisitive creatures, and can often be induced to approach nearer by some sound. They are supposed to be especially fond of music, and it is a common practice with sealers to whistle

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plaintively, and attract them in that way. I have frequently tried this plan with success; but on this occasion, although several seals put their heads up high and listened, they evidently mistrusted appearances.

Near the point where we sat for the seals was a high sand-bank, on the top of which was a stone *bolvan*, or idol, about a foot and a half high, surrounded as usual by many horns and bones of reindeer. It was only a stone, though the Samoyeds thought a great deal of it, "because," they said, "it is so very old."

The Samoyed religion is a form of Shamanism. Their chief deity is the god "Nûm." Figures intended to represent this god are cut out of wood or stone and fixed up upon hills or mounds held to be sacred. Many of these images are exceedingly old, and proportionately held in great veneration.

This one had been there as a *bolvan*, they told me, for a very great number of years. I examined it very carefully, but could not

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see that it had ever been chipped or carved by the hand of man. The Samoyeds insisted that it had a face, and pointed to its features ; but these were quite imaginary, for I could detect nothing of the kind.

A little stream ran out of a bog and across the sand to the gulf. As it went down the last slope of the sand, it hurried very much ; and here I saw a black water-beetle, who had come out of the bog-water and had been carried down by the stream. It was swimming very hard against the current, but with its best efforts could not hold its own. Inch by inch it was carried backwards, till at last it was swept into the salt water, and about a yard from the edge it sank. It was, I suppose, the old story—dissatisfaction with humble surroundings, and a longing to see the world : a start—all hopefulness ; a long struggle against adverse circumstances, and, finally—what ? Let us hope he is a salt-water beetle by this time, for the water was really only brackish (at low tide) where he went in, and you can educate

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a beetle to almost anything if you give it him bit by bit.

The next morning (September 26th) found the rigging all ice, the land hard frozen, and a thin skim of ice along the sands where the tide had stayed. About mid-day all the work was finished. The barrels were piled in two heaps upon the tundra, and about them the sealskins were laid. Then the *Alexander* and the *Michael* were both scrubbed down, and we brought our things ashore.

The finding of a place where two boats could lie through the winter was a question of some moment. When the ice breaks up in the spring,—when the river, swollen by the melting snow, comes tearing down, breaking up the heavy ice, till the whole gulf is a confused mass of immense ice-blocks crashing up and down between stream and tide,—woe be to the boat that has been carelessly laid up! The Russians walked up and down the bank for a long time considering this point. At last they pitched upon a fairly

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secure spot, and to this the boats were hauled, and made fast to the shore with chain and kedge.

As Pronia's little *choom*—a wigwam covered with reindeer skin—was not large enough for us all, we rigged up a tent with oars and sails which took us comfortably. Our breakfast on this day consisted of flat fish—Arctic flounders—which Pronia had taken with a net from the gulf—and tea ; so we were well off. We were sitting at this meal, when a black speck appeared on the water across the gulf. It came nearer and nearer, till we could make out two Samoyeds rowing a canoe in their favourite fashion—face to the bows. The boat touched the shore, and two wizened old men got out. They were so much interested in examining Hyland and myself that for a long time they did not speak, only they listened to all that was explained as to who we were and what doing. One of them, whose face seemed strangely familiar to me, though I could not imagine why, explained that they had been

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lying up for seals, when they caught sight of the vessel's mast moving against the sky. And then I found out why his face had struck me so, for he was a brother of Marrk Ardéoff, an old Samoyed whom I had known upon Kolguev Island, who was in many ways an interesting character. He managed Alexander's brother's reindeer away in the Gobista hills of Kolguev. I had lived some days alone with him and his old wife on the occasion of a visit to some Holy Hills in his neighbourhood. On that occasion, when I proposed to climb a sacred hill in order to inspect the idols on its summit, old Marrk had thrown himself face downwards on the earth, remaining in this posture during the whole of my visit, fearing the vengeance of his god. I now told our visitor that I knew his brother well, and what respect I had for the old man. I told him how I had visited him and his wife on the Gobista, and how kind they were; how old Haretina had insisted on lying out all one night that I might have their little tent, or *yiersuk*, and that Marrk had



A NORTH RUSSIAN TRADER.

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taken me to the Holy Hills. The old brother was delighted. "Good, good," he said at every stop in the story. He informed me that he had been brought away from Kolguev as a boy, had found a wife on the mainland, and had not seen his brother since.

But some things he told us were not reassuring, for there were no Samoyeds, he said, where he had come from, and we could not hope to find any unless we first went up in the small boats to the very head of the gulf.

The change from Kolguev to this point, so little removed from it, was very striking. Many of the plants, indeed nearly all, which had been in flower on Kolguev up to the time of the snow had evidently bloomed much earlier here, for they had even lost their seeds. Every form of plant life was far more luxuriant than on the island; the woolly willow was already quite a fair bush, and many of the grasses waved as high as in an English June. There were large flocks

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of snow-buntings and lapland-buntings hunting all the grassy, sandy ground, and along the edge of the water hundreds of sanderlings ran and fed. They were feeding on small medusæ and on a pteropod, of which great numbers were cast up by the waves.

I tried to find out from Pronia something about the Samoyeds of Yalmal (or Yelmert's Land), a Siberian peninsula, long known to be one of their most ancient homes. But he only waved his hand to the east, and said they were very bad, wild people over there, who used knives, and would kill you. This curious idea, which seems to be generally shared by the western Samoyeds, must point, I suppose, to old tribal wars. At the same time, it is worth remembering that perhaps the only instance of unfriendliness among these people of which we have any record is that given by Stephen Burrough of the Yalmal Samoyeds who shot at the early Norwegians with bows and arrows.

CHAPTER II

SEARCHING FOR SAMOYEDS

THURSDAY, the 27th of September, broke with a fine light wind from the east. We were to move away. The little group in which in Kolguev days we had held together was to be broken up by the loss of the Samoyeds.

There were great farewells that morning. They shook our hands often, and said they would see us again, or if not, they would remember us always. These Samoyeds (Onaska the Kolguev prophet, Stobka, and three others) had formed our crew. They had no reindeer, no boats ; they were going to walk round the head of the gulf. It was curious to see them going off like this, the men we had known so intimately and well,

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and brought back to me vividly an occasion on the prairies when we had put an old chief down from the train and he walked straight away from us into distance and void. It was the same now with these poor Samoyeds. For a little time between us and them the extremes had met of advanced and of primitive existence, and now it was past. From the waste they had come, to the waste they were going, and they went to their own people. Only Timafè came with us, for he was henchman to Alexis Samarokoff, merchant of Askino. In Timafè my readers may remember the hideous, half-witted Samoyed, who during all the time of our difficulties, and especially during those days when we had been held prisoners by fog, had reiterated his wearisome chanting taunt of "England far, far away!" so that I used to call him Solomon Eagle.

So we left in the two small boats and pulled for the head of the bell-shaped gulf.

In the boat which led were Alexander,

SEARCHING FOR SAMOYEDS

Yakoff Popoff, Marrk's old brother, who came as pilot, Hyland, myself, and old Sailor the spaniel. The boat which followed took Alexis, Vasili, his man Andrè, and Timafè. It was not easy work; a strong east wind got up, the boats were heavily laden, we grounded once or twice and we shipped much water, but we landed at last off a tongue of land which ran out between the Kolokolkova and Kambalnitza rivers.

Because of the shallowness of the water, we had to unload the boats some thirty yards out in the water and carry the things ashore.

This was a long operation, and not a pleasant one with much surf breaking on a lee shore. We therefore formed a line, I taking the things from the boat and carrying them to the next man, who passed them on. Had the boat been steadier, it would have been comparatively easy work, but she was always being lifted and knocked about by the breakers.

As soon as all were landed, I set out with

A NORTHERN HIGHWAY OF THE TSAR

Alexander and Alexis to try and find a party of Samoyeds whom old Marrk's brother assured us were encamped in the neighbourhood, though he was not certain where. After we had wandered for a long time over a very swampy tract of tundra, we came upon a fresh sleigh-track, and followed this until at last, towards evening, sweeping the horizon with my telescope, I detected against the distant sky-line a spike or point, which experience told me was a Samoyed's choom. Of course, it could not be seen with the naked eye, and my companions had never mastered the focussing of my telescope, nor could they ever hold it still enough for observation. But it had so often been a good friend to them before that they had faith in its powers, and were quite ready to follow my lead. On we went, therefore, until at last it came more clearly into sight, and soon we were walking up to a choom surrounded by many reindeer. This dwelling was occupied by Samoyeds, who seemed pleasant people, and expressed

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themselves at once quite ready to go for our belongings if we would give them time to make up some sleighs ; for they had no sleighs that would do for carrying boxes or any weights. But this is not a matter of much moment to a Samoyed. Seizing on a heap of firewood, they all went to work with a will, and at the end of a couple of hours had made up, out of this rough wood and some old runners, three good strong freight sleighs which would carry all our property well ; and, going off at a gallop, in a few hours' time they came back in fine style, the baggage well packed, and Hyland perched up gaily on the top. The willingness which these Samoyeds showed to help was no doubt partly due to the credentials which I carried ; but at the same time it is only fair to them to say that I always found a kind readiness to be of service one of the most unfailing characteristics of this simple nomadic race.

There were several children about this choom, and they had bells fastened to their

A NORTHERN HIGHWAY OF THE TSAR

clothes, which tinkled like sheep-bells and told of their whereabouts wherever they went. I make the idea a present to mothers in England.

The reindeer were much more forward here than on Kolguev, for the horns of nearly all the bulls were quite clean, and they had their thick white winter coats with beautiful full necks like those in the picture-books. There was a young reindeer whose mother had died just about the time it began to feed itself. The children had taken it in hand, and it was now a well-grown, thriving youngster, with sprouting horns. It was ridiculously tame, and would come up and poke its nose into our hands for food. It was really rather a nuisance, for it would not keep out of the choom; and it is a trial to have a big reindeer calf walking about over you when you are sitting on the ground at meals. Outside there was also a privileged old deer as tame as any cow, who reminded me of little Wanka's pet deer on Kolguev. Wanka, my readers may remem-

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ber, was a little Samoyed boy, and universal favourite. Among the reindeer attached to our camp on Kolguev, which numbered some five hundred, was an old buck which the child had tamed. This old deer was a perfect slave to the child, and submitted with the utmost obedience to his every whim. Hour after hour it would stand lifting its legs for the coils of harness in which the boy tied it up. The deer I am now referring to was almost as tame. I came round the corner once and found it feeding steadily on flatfish, which had been thrown down in heaps. I watched it for some time, and was much struck by the skill with which it rejected all the entrails, though I failed to see exactly how this was done. But reindeer are very adroit feeders. I often used to watch them on Kolguev. There is a certain white lichen, very dry and stiff, which they always rejected, filtering it out from the other moss by some clever action of the tongue and palate, so that it fell perfectly separated on either side.

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We ate here a kind of bread which did not taste very well. It was made of the usual rye dough, but putrid fish was mixed with it. This bread they called *marksa*.

The meal finished, each person crawled under a skin with feet to the fire. The women and children kept together, and the rest lay in a continuous ring all around. It was not at all comfortable, for it rained all night and the rain came dripping through the choom. I was particularly badly placed, since a constant stream came through a hole above me and formed a runnel below. But I could not change my position without spoiling the rest of some one else, for the choom could only just hold us all, and we were lying literally cheek by jowl all round it.

There was no silence in the choom until far on into the night. It seemed as if they would never stop talking. We were, as usual, the one topic of conversation. The whole of our Kolguev history was told and retold for the twentieth time. Every little point was canvassed and discussed. How

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the boats had gone away, and we had walked across the land ; how we had slept on the bare ground ; how my eyes had been frozen together ; how we had come from England, an island even farther off than Norway, right across the sea : of the way we shot birds, quicker than any of themselves ; how our dog with such long curly ears brought back in his mouth the birds we killed, never biting them, but yielding them up to us ; how we collected all flowers and all birds, and even had many bits of stone. And then they ended as they always did : " This one," pointing to me, " all things knows and all things understands." With that I roared out laughing, and asked whether they would not like me to make a little kingdom in the North here by the Pechora. " Yes, yes," shouted the little Samoyeds with one acclaim. But Alexander the Russian crossed himself and said, " The Tsar is our king and our father. He is good."

The talking stopped at last, and soon all were asleep.

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Alexander had insisted that I should share with him a large pillow which he carried on his voyages. This I should have declined but for fear of hurting his feelings ; but I had been asleep for about an hour or so, when I was awakened by a chorus of snoring, and particularly by Alexander, whose face was but a few inches from my own. After that I did not get to sleep again. The choom (with every aperture but the smoke-hole at the apex bunged up, and stuffed full of old skins and human beings) became intolerable, and presently, steering my way with difficulty between the outstretched legs of the sleepers, I went out into the night. The rain had lifted, there was a fog, and it was very cold. It would be difficult to imagine anything much wilder. Through a thin place in the fog-roof the moonbeams found an uncertain way, and whitened a long reach on the waters of the lake behind the choom. High overhead you could hear the cries of birds, belated in their journey South, and from far away across the tundra came now

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and then a hissing wash, as a larger wave than ordinary broke on the stones of the beach by the gulf. And always, incessant and defiant, out of the white, cold mists that swept the waste, sounded the hoarse belling of the reindeer bulls, for the rutting season was now on, or came more softly the cry of a cow to its calf.

I walked round on the plateau for some time, listening to all these things, and presently came upon the pet calf, who was feeding all by itself at the edge of a creek. It immediately came up and followed me about, poking its nose under my arm in search of food. After a little I lifted the flap of the choom and looked inside; but the conditions were so much worse after the fresh outside air that my courage failed me, so, turning a couple of sleighs upside down, I crawled underneath, and was presently asleep.

CHAPTER III

A JOURNEY WITH REINDEER SLEIGHS

IT was still dark the next morning when a warm tongue licked my face and woke me up. Dear old Sailor the spaniel had come round to tell me it was time to be moving, as we had a long day before us.

So I rolled out of my refuge, feeling still rather sleepy, for it had been a very broken night.

The women made a great fuss over parting with Sailor. Wherever he went, and long after this in the north of Russia, it was the same. They had never seen a dog of that type before, all their dogs being prick-eared and wolfish in appearance. His long, silky ears were a constant delight to them, and his invariable friendliness won their hearts at once. They were never tired of stroking

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his ears and saying, in their local *patois*, a mixture of Russian and Samoyed, "Pretty dog, pretty dog," over and over again; and Sailor took it all as his right, and had the impudence to growl warningly at any dog of the place who came near him then.

Soon after six o'clock we left—ten sleighs and fifty reindeer. We soon found that we had a very bad bit of country to cross, and the experiences of this one day gave me, I think, a clearer idea of what reindeer actually can do than I had gained from all my previous acquaintance with these wonderful animals.

For the first two or three hours after the start we never crossed any solid ground at all, the whole country was either of bog or lake. When you are engaged with a long train of sleighs in boggy ground, it is often necessary to separate and spread out, or the crust of the bog would be broken and the track hopelessly churned up. But on this day we came to a place where this was not possible.

On the right hand lay a long lake, on the

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left a swamp—not a bog, but a swamp—a wide tract of land covered with reed-beds and horse-tail (*Hippuris*), growing in water from one to three feet deep. Here and there were also those curious lanes of deep water which so often form themselves by some natural process in a swampy country. Although the deer could have easily crossed the swamp, the sleighs, drivers, and baggage would have become soaking wet. But the lake was separated from the swamp by a narrow causeway of higher ground. In places it may have been six feet wide, but often it was not more than three or four. This causeway we had to traverse. It ran for about a mile; sometimes it was formed of fairly solid peat, but was more usually very soft and boggy from the soakage of the lake. Where it was widest, a team of reindeer, five abreast (as each team was this day), by crowding up together could just find a footing; but at the narrow parts the right-hand deer, or *warrhu* (to use the Samoyed word), had to swim in the lake, the left-hand

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deer, or *niasmintá*, to plunge along in the water of the swamp, and occasionally two deer would be in the lake on the right hand, or two in the swamp on the left. My readers will no doubt be familiar with pictures which show only two reindeer attached to each sleigh. But in that case the ground would be covered with snow. Two reindeer can comfortably pull two persons on a sleigh over the snow; but during the summer and in autumn before the snow comes, this work would prove too severe. Therefore, during these seasons five reindeer are harnessed abreast to each sleigh, and with such a team a man may travel from twenty to thirty miles a day for days on end over grass or moss or the roughest country.

Now, though the leading teams could manage fairly well, each that followed contributed to the general churning up of the boggy ground, until the poor deer who came last had often to find their way through a deep bath of liquid mud. There was about a mile of this, and we had gone, perhaps,

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half that distance, when I heard a shout from Hyland, who was just behind me, and, looking back, this was what I saw. His middle deer had fallen, and had all but disappeared in a mud-hole, and the sleigh had run over on to the top of it. Its head was underneath the mud, so that you could only see the horns sticking up. It took the united efforts of Hyland, a Samoyed, and myself to move the sleigh off the top of the deer. The ground was so soft that we worked nearly up to our waists in liquid mud. I suppose it scarcely took us three minutes, though the time seemed much longer. As soon as we had the sleigh clear, I struggled to the nearest free reindeer, intending to hitch it on to the buried deer's horns and haul it out; I scarcely hoped that the animal would live, for I felt sure that it must by this time have been suffocated. But the creature soon dispelled all anxiety; with a plunge and a struggle it rose of its own accord from its muddy bed, blew the mud out of its nostrils, shook itself, and began quietly nibbling at some moss. A

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horse who had been as badly bogged as this would, even if not disabled, have come out helpless and trembling, and would probably have been useless for the remainder of the day ; but so little was this deer affected that after we had led it for a mile or so, fastened to the back of the sleigh, we hitched it in again and went gaily on. For now we had got out into a sounder, drier country, and went on hour after hour in silence, relieved only by the Samoyed grunt that does duty for "gee-up," by the clicking of the rein-deers' hoofs and the singing of the sleighs upon the grass. But the going was not always equally smooth. We came to one big ditch, in which I thought I saw a pretty fair crossing, though the banks sloped very suddenly down. You can generally get over these places all right if you keep your team straight, put them at it quickly, and lie right back on the sleigh. But one of my deer pulled a little unevenly, and the point of the sleigh catching in the ground just as we reached the bottom, the whole concern was

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shot over, and I was half buried in water, snow, and mud. I had, however, kept tight hold of the driving rein (for only a single rein is used), and instinctively seizing the back of the sleigh, was hauled out by the team, and dragged up to the top of the bank. Here I brought my team to a standstill, collected my gun, cartridges, and other effects, which had flown in different directions, emptied the water from my boots, wrung out my socks and trousers, and was soon ready to go on again, though I felt very cold and uncomfortable for the rest of the day.

As we had not the least idea where we should meet with any Samoyeds, every little bit of rising ground found us anxiously scanning the tundra. At last I made out with my glass one of the little conical points which, as I have said before, a distant *choom* or wigwam resembles, and for this we steered. It proved to be the most spacious and the best *choom* we had yet seen. Perfectly new, its birch-bark covering was beautifully red in colour, and the flap which concealed the

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entrance was made of the same material, instead of the reindeer skin to which we had hitherto been accustomed. This birch-bark curtain had been so skilfully manipulated that it was as flexible as a Persian hanging.

The choom belonged to one Michael Taleoff, a good-looking young man with light flaxen hair ; and though his young wife was a pure Samoyed, it was not difficult to see that he had Russian blood in his veins.

At this choom we remained that night, and Michael asked me through Alexander the Russian whether I would mind going with him the following morning to doctor his wife's father, who a few weeks before had cut his knee very badly with an axe. Alexander had told him how I had cured complaints upon Kolguev ; and although pills and common sense had met nearly all these cases, they were enough to spread my fame as a doctor. So in the grey of the morning we left, he and I, with two splendid teams of deer, and went full gallop sixteen versts across the waste.

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It was a crooked journey, for we were constantly winding in and out among little lakes; but at last we came upon a couple of chooms. All was strangely silent; not a dog's voice greeted us, not a child was running about. One choom was standing open and empty, the flap over the door of the other was closed. My guide raised it, and we entered. As soon as my eyes grew accustomed to the dim light which came through the opening in the top (the smoke-hole), I was able to see an old Samoyed lying full length upon a reindeer skin. His son-in-law bent over him, and explained who I was and why I had come. The poor old man regarded me with much curiosity, as the first Englishman he had ever seen, and after asking many questions about Kolguev Island, proceeded to explain his accident. He had been cutting out a runner for his sleigh, when the axe slipped and injured his knee. The bone had evidently been injured, and the whole knee had swollen badly, and was much inflamed. His wife, he told me, had been at-

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tending to him, but had now gone across the river with dogs to bring up the reindeer. She evidently knew nothing of doctoring, for the man's knee was quite bare and exposed to the cold. I had come provided with lint and bandages, which I gave him, and showed him how to make a bread-and-water compress, and to put it on. They had, of course, no white bread, but only the rye bread which they bake on sticks, which I hoped would do as well. The old man's gratitude was most touching to see. He held my hand long in his own, and repeated in Russian, "Thank you much; yes, yes, very much," over and over again, so that it was quite difficult to get away. But I left at last, hoping most sincerely that the poor old fellow would recover. I warned him that he must be prepared for a stiff knee; but that, he said, he should not mind, if he could only get the pain away. I have often thought of the old man since, and have wondered whether he recovered.

A beautiful sight awaited me as I left the

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choom. A wide river ran some hundred yards away, which, except for some curling wreaths of mist, was now flashing in the morning sun. Several fine reindeer were swimming across, towing three boats, on each of which a sleigh was packed. A Samoyed woman was sculling a fourth boat, and encouraging the deer with her voice. They had not come half-way across before the entire herd, numbering several hundreds, and driven by the dogs, who barked wildly behind, plunged in and followed.

The morning sun, the mist, the wild surroundings, the deer—some landing and shaking the water from their splendid winter coats, and calling to the remainder, who with horns laid back were gallantly swimming across—made up a picture one cannot easily forget.

I was still standing lost in the sight, when I heard a voice behind me saying, in broken Russian, "This is for him who came to us in our trouble ; this is for our friend ;" and turning round, there stood Michael Taleoff,

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with a pretty blue fox's skin in his hand, which he insisted on my taking as a gift. It was a very appropriate doctor's fee, considering where I was; and I was much touched by the poor fellow's evident gratitude, and by the graceful words which accompanied his gift. But it was time to return, so jumping on to our sleighs we put the deer to a gallop, and were soon back with our party. I had my breakfast off reindeer flesh, and then we harnessed up and our caravan moved on.

There is a "road" about here, using the word in its tundra sense of a track worn by sleigh passage over the moss and grasses. It is the way that is used in passing from Pustosersk and Askinö to Zavarot at the Pechora mouth. After a while we struck this and travelled along it, passing large tracts of willow no higher than the horns of the deer, but seeming veritable forest trees after the barrenness of Kolguev, where the tallest bush is but a few inches high. Presently we came to a high point, from which

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we looked right over the Kolokolkova River and Gulf, and saw in the distance white glimpses which we were told marked the course of the Pechora.

The snow fell thickly as we continued our journey, and that evening we came upon a choom, where we were glad to find a willow-wood fire, and to make ourselves warm for the night. The occupants of this choom were very unpleasant people. They were half-breeds—half Russian, half Samoyed—and gave us but a surly welcome. I fancied that they knew Alexander (though he would not admit this), and had had perhaps some trading quarrel with him. At any rate, it was clear they did not want us, though they could not well refuse us lodging for the night. A white dog crept in to the fire while we were there, and from his laboured breathing and other symptoms I saw at once that he was suffering from internal inflammation. The man, who in spite of my protest seemed quite unable to understand that the dog was ill, told one of the children to

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take it out and tie it up with the others. "If you turn that dog out into the cold," I told him, "it will be dead by the morning." But he only laughed, and said the dog always had been out, and that it would not hurt it. The next morning of course the poor dog was dead. Then they were sorry, and all talked angrily and at once. "It was the best reindeer dog they had; they would rather have lost all the others than this," and so on. What they said to Alexander about us I could never learn, but they talked us over most excitedly with him, and I shall always believe that they somehow associated me with the dog's death; whereas the dog's previous condition would have been as clear as daylight to any yokel here at home. These people were what we should call a bad lot. Alexander was afraid they would do some injury to our reindeer; so as soon as it was light, without waiting for any breakfast, we harnessed up and were off.

We travelled on under rather trying circumstances, for a fine cutting blizzard snow

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drove all that day, and made it very difficult to see. Also because we left without breakfast, and had nothing to eat by the way but dried stale bread, which the Russians call *sukarr*, we were not well fortified against the cold. But by the evening we came to the Golodna Gulf, and here we fell in with some Russian peasants at another Samoyed choom. They had come up from a little hut by the side of the gulf, where they stayed for the fishing. I found them there when I was wandering in the dark that evening, and went in. They gave me some of their sour cream and bread, and little cakes, which seemed excellent to me, for we had now been for a considerable time upon worse than prison fare. The hut was built entirely of turfs, and in the middle was a raised square of stones and mud, on which the fire was laid. The Russian was very hospitable. "Eat, eat," he said, whenever I paused, as we all sat round one bowl in the Russian peasant fashion, and dipped our bread into the bowl.



A PEASANT GIRL.

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They told me it had been a very poor fishing season, and that things generally were bad with them. They were hale-looking, industrious fellows, and the elder man had his daughter with him—a fair-haired, fresh-faced girl, not pretty, but very pleasant in appearance as a change from the Samoyed type.

It was a night of piercing cold, and the snow fell without a pause. In the morning old Sailor had a touch of rheumatism in his shoulder. However, when we left we packed him up very warmly on a sleigh, and he soon shook it off. It is remarkable that, though an old dog, this, in spite of the rough times through which he passed, was the only occasion in all our travels on which he was ever sick or sorry for an hour.

There was a fine fox tied up at this choom, remarkable as being entirely red; not even on its face was there any black hair. The hair on its belly was yellow and not white. There was no white in its back or brush and only a very little about the muzzle.

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We had seen hundreds of willow grouse on the previous day, most of them so white in their winter plumage that, would they have squatted instead of standing with heads outstretched, you never could have seen them against the snow. These and a single pair of ravens were all the birds I saw that day.

It was now the first of October by our English reckoning, and the bird life was increasing.

High up over our heads two flights of wild swans, fifteen in the first flock, twenty in the next, passed on their way to the south, and several parties of grey and hooded crows showed that we were nearing a new country. The willow of the days before had already given place to juniper, and soon we were among the spruce. It was very cold; the snow, which drove before a north cutting wind, did not fall in flakes, but in those separate, small, crystalline atoms of starry and beautiful patterns, which are never seen here in England, but are characteristic of great dryness and cold. On the ground

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it now lay a foot or so in depth, but this only made the sleighs go more easily. So we rounded the head of the Golodna Gulf, and about three o'clock that afternoon Alexander suddenly pulled up on the top of a high bit of ground, and pointing across the snow-field said, "Look!" and there below us lay the Pechora, studded, as it seemed, with islands. Askinö, his home, he told us, lay just there, and we thought we could make out a clearing and a village. But whether or no, we kept on our course, until at last we found ourselves galloping down a steep slope that brought us to the brink of the Pechora. There it lay, the great river, wide and broken now after its thousand miles of running from the Ural Mountains on the edge of Asia. We could see the village well enough now, and we shouted all together to try and make some one hear. But it was not the sort of day on which any one would be out of doors, and we failed altogether of our purpose. Then we set to work to unload the sleighs. Bags, boxes, tents

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and all were soon deposited in the snow ; the Samoyeds were paid ten roubles for their trouble, and jumping on their sleighs, these hardy children of the waste were soon out of sight on their way back to the Bell-shaped Gulf. There was just one boat lying on our side of the stream ; it was a small, unseaworthy-looking craft, but the Russians thought that they could manage a crossing in it, and send a bigger boat back ; and indeed it did not look a very difficult job. So Alexander, Alexis, Yakoff, and I embarked. But we had been deceived. In front of us was a long island, which protected the wide stretch of water on the nearer side from the wind, and all went well till we reached this. No sooner, however, had we rounded its northern point than we could see we were in for a bad thing. Our boat would have taken over one person well enough, but with four in it was far too heavily laden, her gunwale being indeed close down to the water's edge. And the river that now lay between Askinö and ourselves was coming along in front of the

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gale, torn into great rollers with angry, broken tops. We shipped a good deal of water, but got through all right at last, after a severe pull, with nothing worse than a soaking ; but although it really was rather a doubtful time, I could not help being amused at the Russians, who, whenever a bigger wave than ordinary threatened to overwhelm us, shouted at it all together, as if that could do any good. As the proper landing place was too exposed and too dangerous, we dared not attempt it ; but passing on, we presently managed to pull in behind a spit of sand, and hauling up the boat, began to walk up to the village. As we reached the proper landing place, we found a crew of four men, who had seen us crossing, just ready to put off in a large boat for those we had left behind. It was not long before all were brought across, and so we reached the town of Askinö—the first point of civilization we had seen since we sailed out of Vardö harbour in the spring.

CHAPTER IV

ASKINÖ

WE in England, and in these days, can perhaps hardly conceive of the condition of life in a high northern Russian village. Here in England—where the daily pulse of the markets is synchronous with that of Rio or Ceylon ; where thought is transferred but a trace less quickly than thought is formed ; where the hind in the tap-room of the remotest seaport keeps touch with labour movements through the daily press ; where the clerk takes his holiday in Switzerland or Spain, and yet by a strange contradiction a neighbour ten miles distant seems a neighbour far away—here we cannot now conceive of living with these conditions changed. Nor, indeed, could we go back in thought down the ages of our history should we come upon

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an exact parallel to the life lived to-day in these small settlements.

For nearly half the year the sun never shines. No daylight; imagine it! Think of these months of darkness, not as a discomfort, for one winter, or two or three, inseparable from an Arctic expedition, but as a recurrent feature in every year throughout the whole of your life. And then the isolation—five hundred miles from your nearest town; a thousand miles from the nearest railway station; separated from these by belt on belt of waste, morass, and forest, dependent on a voyage certainly of three days, and if the weather is unfavourable of a week or even more, up a river to the nearest “road,” and this but a track cleared in the wilderness. Askinö in these respects is like a dozen other little villages in Arctic Russia.

Yet these people, isolated in this way from the heart of the life of their country, are at least as advanced as corresponding classes in our own land. They read, they

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write, they are keen men of business ; they have their municipal government, if that is the word ; at any rate, they have a sort of mayor—a *starshina* he is called. Vasili Popoff, servant to Alexis Samarokoff, who was with us on Kolguev, was to be starshina this year ; he had been elected then, but had not as yet, so to say, taken over the seals.

But nearly all their trade is referable to the sea and the tundra. For the sealskins and furs of all kinds collected by the Samoyeds pass through the hands of these small northern traders, who, like the servants of the Hudson's Bay Company, are middlemen between the trappers and the dealers in the towns.

Askinö, which is a village of seventy-eight houses, is perhaps more markedly a Samoyed centre than any other town on the Pechora. Here alone one finds the Samoyed tongue spoken by the Russians themselves ; for here the Russian lads between the ages of fourteen and nineteen are sent away to live on the tundra, in the chooms of

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the Samoyeds, to acquire their language and to learn their ways.

On the whole, Askinö on its island is more actually out of the world than any town or village I have seen in the Tsar's dominions. Ust Tsilma is a metropolis compared with it; but then Ust Tsilma is distant a five days' voyage by water, for there is no road worth its name between the two. You will naturally ask how the people subsist, cut off from the world like this. In the first place the labour is almost entirely done by Samoyeds, and is as often paid for in vodka, tea, or clothing material as in money. There appeared to me to be a constant running account between the Samoyeds and their employers, the balance always against the Samoyeds. Actual want of food there never is. The Pechora abounds in fish, of which Alexander gave me the following list (I spell the names phonetically): omyl, chirr, sik, nahlim, syomga, pieylet, shukar, nyelma, orkhun, yass, saild, goletz, koomzha, yorrzsh. Of these the syomga, or salmon, is

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accounted the best ; while from omyl (*Salmo omyl*) and sik (fish resembling bream) they make *eekra*, i.e. caviare. This caviare we often ate quite fresh ; it is of a light yellow colour. Most of the Askinö merchants own reindeer, and they also buy reindeer meat from the Samoyeds. A little rye is grown round the village, and so they get their black bread. There is a wealthy merchant of St. Petersburg, M. Sibiriakoff, who sends a steamer up round the coasts once or twice every year, selling to the people snuff, flour, sugar, tea, and cotton stuffs, and cheap ornaments. These the little merchants buy, dealing them out again in exchange for labour and skins. But there is no shop-front in Askinö. Everything is stored out of sight. A fairish trade seems to be done in cloud-berries. These are packed in barrels and boxes, and find their way down south. These wild berries, which are like raspberries in appearance, but rather tasteless, are considered to be, when preserved in rum, an effective preventive of scurvy.

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Askinö is a village of wooden houses, scattered up and down without much regard to definite streets. The principal artery is a mud road, which we found deep with snow and pools of farmyard drainage; for most of the people keep a little ragged cow, which lives on the ground floor of the houses, and the farmyard is formed by the very simple device of carrying fences across the street. Foot progress when we were there was further spoilt by lines running in all directions, on which green reindeer hides were hanging to dry; so that, what with wading and climbing and ducking, an ordinary stroll was not to be lightly undertaken.

The first floor is the "living" floor, and is approached by wooden steps, or in many cases by the *povjet*, a wooden inclined plane. At the head of the village stands the church, a plain building with three green cupolas, but beautiful inside, as Russian churches always are.

A very proud man that day was Alexander Samarokoff, as he led the way to his

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own home, one of the best houses in the place. His greeting with his wife, about whom he had so often spoken to us on Kolguev, was most affectionate, though he took no notice of her or of his little children until he had said prayers before the *ikon* in the room. These *ikoni* are pictures of saints, before which burn lamps or candles. They always occupy a prominent place in the sitting-room, and often every room has one. This, the first duty of every good Greek Catholic on entering a house, is in my experience nowhere so faithfully observed as among the northern peasantry. I do not think that you could find anywhere a more united family than Alexander's. He had been married twice, and by his first marriage had one son, now a lad of about nineteen, who came in on a sleigh to greet his father, from the choom away on the tundra, where for the last seven years he had been living with the Samoyeds, in order that he might thoroughly speak their language and be a skilled reindeer manager. He was a good-

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looking young fellow, with cheery and pleasant manners.

Four months had now gone by since I had had a good bath, for an occasional hurried dip in the sea between the ice floes or in an icy stream was but a poor substitute for an English tub ; and Hyland had not even done as much. I felt therefore that a bath was necessary before anything else, and insisted on Hyland having one also. While this was preparing, they promised us tea, and already the samovar was steaming very pleasantly in Mrs. Samarokoff's room. The things we ate seemed very good to us then, though it was but a simple meal. The *smetana*, or junket, appeared again, with *kallatch*, the hard ring bread, and *collob*, the scones or cakes. Then there was *kvass* (the weakest of swipes-like beer), and tea with lemon, fresh milk, beef, and reindeer meat, and different kinds of fish.

The news of our arrival had already spread, and while we were at tea an old Russian with a long white beard appeared.

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"I have come to see them," he explained, as he entered. "I said to my wife, 'Now I go quickly to look.'" And look he did with a vengeance. We might have been Aztecs, or some other sort of show. It was rather discomposing to be stared at like this. Poor Hyland found it particularly trying; for the old man, standing with his hands on his knees, stared hard up into his face. Presently he raised himself, and said to Alexander, "What's this one's name?" "Hyland," Alexander returned. "Hylum," said the old man reflectively, as he dropped into his former attitude for another long deliberate look; "Hylum; why, he's a Samoyed!"

A string of visitors followed. The priest came, Father Nicholas. He was a *locum tenens* from Pustozersk, for the Askinö priest had died. This priest was a young, good-looking, and very intelligent man. He ate nuts and smoked cigarettes, and told us all the news of these parts. He was particularly inquisitive about Oxford University. Nothing would convince him that I was not

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a Professor. He persisted in attributing my deprecation of that honour to my native modesty. "But you have a degree from there; you have come out now to inquire into the natural sciences of Kolguev. You will write about this; yes, you are a Professor." After this I fancy my importance in Alexander's eyes fell considerably. He had never believed that I had come all this way simply to find out about birds and flowers. He could never understand that any grown man could possibly concern himself with such trifles; and had always been trying to induce me to admit that I was really an emissary of the Governor, who was going to fortify Kolguev for military purposes. And sometimes, on the other hand, he had betrayed a suspicion that I had been sent to report on the trade which the island did; and as his family had kept this so very quiet for forty years and more, he naturally viewed such an inquiry with some dismay. But now the priest's assurance had evidently eased his mind.

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After the priest came the priest's clerk. He came several times. I never exactly determined what his functions were. I saw him in a cassock, and I saw him crying something in the street; not shrimps or oranges, but I fancy an account of something that had been lost; so probably he was the town crier as well as clerk. Wherever he came he brought with him a pen, a bundle of yellow papers, framed almanacks emblazoned with pictures, chiefly of saints (but including Mr. Gladstone), and a mysterious cloth-covered box, which were apparently insignia of office. He had very long hair, and a most astonishing cast of countenance. I have just been looking at a sketch I made of him; it is for all the world like a stage assassin, or the wicked uncle in the "Babes in the Wood." He annoyed me very much by constantly wanting to kiss my hand. I suffered a great deal in Russia through people who wanted to kiss me. It is meant well, but it is irritating, and opposed to our ideas.

By the evening the bath was ready, and

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we turned out again across the snow to have a Russian bath.

The bath-house in Askinö is primitive—a log hut, the crevices filled in with moss, two compartments, an outer for a dressing-room, and an inner, the bath-room. This room was furnished only with a furnace, a bucket and a slab. The furnace, open at the top, was filled with charcoal. The bucket held water and a bundle of birch twigs, and on the slab we lay like flat fish. The damp heat, characteristic of Russian baths, was insured by the very simple device of sprinkling water on the hot charcoal with the broom. By repeating this at intervals you gradually raised the temperature to the neighbourhood of boiling-point. It was best, as you swished the broom at the charcoal, to escape rapidly backwards in the same movement, if you could, because of the bursting steam-cloud which followed. So you melted away, finishing up with a bucketful of cold water, and finally came out into the snow a new creature.

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After this we were clothed in Russian peasant costume until our own clothing had been washed. It needed it, for washing-day in Kolguev with snow-water and no soap had always been a very disappointing event. The dresses that we now assumed were those commonly worn by the traders and peasants: long felt knee-boots, skin caftan (or coat), trousers, and shirt. The shirt is the most striking feature, though its full beauty is only obvious indoors. For then, with the caftan removed, the shirt is the outer garment. These shirts are usually of white or brown calico; the tails (worn outside the trousers) are embroidered in coloured flowers, which run also round the neck and the wrists and down the front. Altogether they are very pretty.

Life during the few days we spent in Askinö was not particularly eventful. Alexander had visits from all his friends, and in every case the same etiquette was observed. All callers were given tea, and while it was brewing visitor and host sat on

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either side of a small table and discussed nuts. This nut-eating habit is a point of courtesy corresponding to our snuff-taking in old days. They are queer little three-cornered nuts (really the seeds of a fir cone), and called *orekhi*. I found them very difficult to shell, but the Russians were as clever at it as bullfinches shelling hemp. I paid a visit to Alexander's mother, a remarkably handsome and dignified old lady, who could have held her own with quiet ease in the drawing-room of a duchess. She took me to her kitchen to see how the griddle-cakes were made, and here in a side room I found, to my surprise, an old acquaintance, Yakoff Popoff. This Yakoff was a snub-nosed, red-haired Russian, who had come to Kolguev as Alexander's head man, to act as his servant and superintend the skinning of reindeer. His was not altogether a pleasant character, for he was very boastful and conceited, on the ground that he alone of his company had been as far as Cronstadt, when he was soldiering. It had

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happened that I had locked in my box a Samoyed idol, or *bolvan*, and while on the ship, during the crossing, the severe storms which we experienced were attributed by the superstitious crew to my possession of this thing. Yakoff in particular had been most troublesome about it, and on one occasion had tried to steal it from me. It was curious after this to come upon him here, engaged in the peaceful occupation of shoemaking, which it seemed was his trade. I could not help just twitting him about the bolvan, but he took it very well. "You would have thrown me and my bolvan into the sea if you could, wouldn't you, Yakoff?" I said; "but we are both here, you see, quite safe. The bolvan is in my box, after all." Poor Yakoff, he only shook his head, and said, "Bad storm, bad bolvan," and went on sewing shoes.

It occurred to me that it would be interesting to have some of the Samoyeds with their reindeer, chooms, and general belongings on exhibition in London. Accordingly

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I asked Alexander what could be done in that way. After talking it over, it seemed that 100 reindeer could be bought for 1000 R., and that each head of a family would expect 300 R. as a fee for coming. Alexander said he could bring them all to Mezen on the White Sea, where a boat could meet them, and that he would come as manager and interpreter. But of course the idea came to nothing.

There was little bird-life at Askinö. The grey or hoodie crows were everywhere, flying in long strings up the river side and wrangling in any odd corner among the houses of the village over such choice morsels as they could find. Magpies also sat on the drying-lines and picked at the reindeer skins till they had cleared off the scantiest bits of fat.

I took Hyland to a village wedding. The daughter of one of the merchants was marrying a young man from Pustosersk. A wedding in Arctic Russia is not different from a Greek Catholic wedding elsewhere,

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and the quaint features of this ceremony are well known now to every one. One part of the function is particularly impressive, that where the bride and bridegroom, with crowns on their heads, are led with joined hands by the priest three times round the book of the Gospels. That evening we went by invitation to the wedding supper, at which there were many curious foods, and vodka played a great part. We were, of course, the subject of much interest. They told us they had not had an Englishman in the place for twenty-five years. In that year there was a wreck on the coast, and the English crew were brought in, suffering terribly from frost-bites, and remained in Askinö till well enough to be sent on.

The merchants were very inquisitive, wanting to know the exact cost of our boots and clothes.

Incessant curiosity like this becomes very tiring, and at last, when they tried to find out the price of a ring I was wearing, I told them that really I did not know, as it had

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been a present. But that was far from satisfying them, so I mentioned laughingly some small sum in kopeks. This, it appeared, annoyed them so much that the following morning a deputation arrived and had a long and noisy palaver with Alexander about it. I sat in my room writing, until he came in to say that they wanted an apology, for they considered it very rude that a stranger should come and accept their hospitality, and then refuse to give them such simple information as the price of his clothes.

The same morning Alexander came into my room and said, "I know you are anxious to be going home. It is necessary that you should start from Ust Tsilma ; but it is 200 versts from here, and if we were to set you on the other side of the river you would be no better off. The swamps are not frozen up, and there is no road through the dense forest. You must go to Ust Tsilma by boat. It often takes us more than a week if the wind is unfavourable, but with the wind northwest you may do it in five days."

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Had I been alone, I should have felt no concern about hurrying my departure; but I could not escape from a sense of responsibility on Hyland's account. Hyland was a young man who had served his apprenticeship in a grocer's store. He was further gifted with those instincts in the securing of game which, while they occasionally get their possessor into trouble, are yet sure of a measure of sympathy in a sporting country such as ours. He was a very good trapper, and a fair shot with a gun, and did a little bird-stuffing in odd moments. Having tried his fortunes, not very successfully, in the United States, he had returned to England, and, led by the desire to get married, had just opened a little greengrocery store. In spite of this, he was very anxious to engage himself as camp-servant and bird-skinner to the expedition, for he had assured himself that he could leave his business in capable hands. He had therefore been engaged for three months, the intended length of the expedition. Had all gone well we should have been home long

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ago; but the ice having cut us off from our ship, we were now in Arctic Russia, with a long and difficult journey still before us. Hyland had always been reckoning upon the trade which Christmas would bring as the turning-point in his business, and expressed great anxiety lest he should lose it by not being on the spot. I had therefore given him my word that, come what might, I would get him home in time for this; for I realized how seriously it might affect his praiseworthy attempt to make a fresh start in life. This digression has been necessary to explain once and for all why it was that I made so much effort to keep pushing on under circumstances too difficult to be attempted on any lesser excuse. Not that I claim for a moment the smallest credit for this resolution on any grounds; on the contrary, I am quite sure that I welcomed this excuse of a promise to Hyland as one that fitted in excellently with my own humour. I make no doubt I should have pushed on anyhow, for at the bottom of all this was frankly that love

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of weathering difficulties which is an instinct with every Englishman.

So now, to begin with, I told Alexander to engage a boat, and that we would start that very evening.

CHAPTER V

ON THE PECHORA

THAT evening, accordingly, the boat was ready. We were to go to Ust Tsilma in one of the trading boats in which merchandise is carried up and down the river. This form of boat is called a *critaya lodka*. It is long and narrow, and the central portion is covered with a low wooden tilt, the *grisha*. Forward of this are three rowers, and aft of it stands the helmsman in a little well. Half of the space under the *grisha* was packed with fish, tubs, green skins, and a miscellaneous trader's collection, and in the other half we were stowed.

I say "stowed" advisedly, for the tilt was so low that we could only crawl in ; and once in and lying down among our belongings,

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to get out again was a serious undertaking. However, we had on the floor several reindeer skins, which Alexander had lent us, so at all events we hoped to keep warm. The old dog Sailor was, at any rate, quite clear on this point. He quickly found out the cosiest corner and was instantly asleep, for by this time he was far too accomplished a traveller to be concerned at trifles; sleigh, or sea, or river boat, it was all one to him. It is a splendid thing to be a dog. A dog can fit into any corner, is never troubled by thought for the morrow, and never suffers from want of sleep.

“Thought for the morrow” reminds me of our stores.

They were not very varied. We had tea, dried fish, butter, and little cakes. At the very last moment Alexander's son came down with a reindeer's hind-leg. I took it as a possible stand-by, and little guessed how invaluable it was destined to prove.

I had given Alexander for his trouble all the money I possessed, with the exception

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of the fare for the boat. Besides 150 roubles and some Norwegian money, I gave him my aneroid and the little compass which had carried us across Kolguev. This last was the one thing I would have kept, but he was so anxious to have it that I could not refuse. I felt, indeed, that, as we should have been doomed to spend a winter on desolate Kolguev but for him, nothing that I could do in return should be left undone. To his wife I gave my one English sovereign, that she might wear it as a brooch. But these presents left me absolutely penniless, and how we were to get on henceforward I really did not know. For Ust Tsilma, I was well aware, was now out of touch with all the world. There was no post, no communication with anywhere, because during this time between the autumn and the winter all the roads were impassable and closed. It was not a cheerful look-out, but circumstances had made me a philosopher, and at any rate nothing more could be done.

It was now the 4th of October, and on

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this day the thermometer fell through 15° of frost. All day a strong wind blew against us, with much snow, and the water on the oars froze up at once and had to be chipped off; for the blades, from accumulating ice, grew round and heavy as clubs. I was sorry for the poor old helmsman, he looked so blue; but our kettle had been forgotten by some carelessness, and we had no spirits, so I could not warm him up. The three men at the oars were less to be pitied, for the motion kept them warm. Only three men could row at once, but with two Russians and two Samoyeds we had one spare man, and I had bargained with our yamshstchik, Vasili, that we should not stop till we reached our point.

This day we passed a willow tree. It came upon me quite as a surprise, for I had not seen a single tree since leaving Norway in the spring.

Early in the following morning we stopped at a little village named Purlimet, and here I bought a kettle.

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All the next day we went up the Pechora. The scenery had suddenly changed. Instead of the low shore line with patches of scrub willow, we were now in between lofty banks with a dense forest on the top. Very splendid in its autumn dress the forest looked to our unaccustomed eyes. Great spruce firs pushed their tops into the sky, and from their arms streamed the lichen like locks of tangled grey-green hair, as you only see it in these northern lands. Against this sombre background larches shone, as it were, till their soft fringes seemed like rays of light ; for winter was close upon them, and the frost had already turned their green to gold. Below this again dog-wood, bramble, mountain-ash, and all the wealth of the forest tangle flamed in a blaze of colour. Under it all lay the snow like a sheet under the damson trees at time of berrying. But only in corners of the little bays behind the backwaters could you see this in perfection ; for where the river ran in long straight reaches of a league or more a ruder sight met the eye.

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You know about the Pechora ? You know how this great waterway (beside which our own Thames is a summer brook), rising in the Urals, winds down for a thousand miles of mountain and forest and flat, till it breaks up into a delta of rivers and islands and finds the Arctic Ocean ? For half the year it is frozen solid, and becomes the great traffic highway through the wastes of all that land. But in early summer comes a great and destructive change. For the water, freed earliest in the warmer districts near its source, rapidly rises, and is banked up against the ice below. It is not very long before these barriers are altogether too feeble for the tremendous force behind them. The water raging down cuts out great channels beneath the ice, and at last breaks upwards with the noise of a Titanic cannonade, cracking and rending the ice-cover which had held it down. Then begins a period of havoc irresistible and immense. Nothing but its own exhaustion can stay the ice-laden flood. Onward it sweeps, widening out on either hand

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often far into the forest lands. The largest trees go down before it and are washed like straws into eddies, where they strand in piled confusion. Here they will remain, the brush-wood pushing up amongst them and dying there, leaves accumulating about them year by year, the trunks themselves slowly rotting and new mounds being added thus to the conformation of the ground, until perhaps after many years' interval, following the changes in the levels, the water comes again that way. Then they are once more unearthed, and carried off—the rotten wood all turned to mud—to be thinly spread as alluvial soil for new growth of forest seeds.

The amazing force of this yearly devastation was abundantly evident in what lay before us now. The river cliffs, carved into great continuous terraces for miles on end, marked with unmistakable accuracy the varying heights of the flood. Into the forest itself above the cliffs the torrent of water and ice had swept, levelling the giant trees and everything which came in its pathway,

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so that often this wreckage lay like swathes of hay-grass a mile inland on either side.

Far in the forest I found the remains of a boat, carried and left there by the flood. For I landed once or twice to give old Sailor a run, and see what game was about. But besides blue hares I found very little to shoot.

Among the undergrowth I came upon many patches of black and red currants. The bushes were covered with bunches of the berries, though they were all hard with the frost. I was surprised to find how large these grew. Even the black currants were fair in size, but the red currants were often not smaller than the best in our English gardens.

We caught a "nahlim" with a hook and line as we went along one day, and ate it for lunch. It was much like a codfish in appearance, and did not taste particularly well.

With a strong wind from the north-west, which, though it brought much snow, was all in our favour, we made fair way.

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On Friday, the 5th, we passed two or three small villages, Lavaskoi first and then Visko (which is inland), and by midnight had come to Maritz. There we experienced the first of those little hitches inseparable from rough travelling.

I had had a rather hard day, for our cramped quarters under the grisha and our slow rate of progress had become so irksome to me that I had spent a great part of the day in the forest. By keeping a careful eye on the lie of the land and the corners of the river, I had managed to see a good deal of the forest and yet not lose the boat; heading it off at the corners. But a boat, even though travelling slowly, soon gains upon a man who rambles round on foot; and what with the snow, the bogs, the runnels and the fallen timber which lay in piles in the forest, I had hard work to do a bit of hunting and yet not miss the position of the boat. So that evening I was pretty tired and slept well.

It was a little after midnight that some change from our accustomed movement woke

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me up. The boat had stopped, and everything seemed still ; only from a corner by my feet came a rhythmic sound of snoring. Something also lay heavy on my feet, which I judged must be old Sailor. With that I struck a light and kicked my feet about to move the dog.

The result was as surprising as unexpected. Up at my feet scrambled our steersman, Vasili, protesting in a voluble jumble of provincial Russian that he had "barrels to land, barrels, did I understand? he had not been asleep, and he didn't want to stop, but nothing could be done before daylight," with much more which I could only half make out. The fact was that the poor man, not yet well awake, was scared out of his wits by the shaking and the sudden light, and afraid of being punished for stopping the boat,—afraid also of losing his money ; for his contract strictly enjoined "no stopping till Ust Tsilma was reached."

I don't think I am hard-hearted. I know, in short, that I have suffered again and again

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on my travels from treating too kindly the men I have employed. But, I reflected in a moment, this was a juncture in the journey which should not be let go by. For every one insisted that the roads being literally impassable we should never get further than Ust Tsilma, or that if we went on from there we must inevitably come to grief, and probably lose all we possessed. It was clear enough to me that an estimate of my character would filter ahead from yamshstchik to yamshstchik, as the way is in such a country, and that if I yielded now I should be considered a greenhorn, and humbugged accordingly. So that men could go to sleep without permission could clearly not be thought of. While, therefore, I inwardly determined that I would stop in the morning and let them rest (for they had already been working hard for very many hours), I insisted that now they should land the barrels and be off, or I should only pay them half the contract money.

Here we were met by another difficulty.

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When the men began to move, I discovered to my disgust that two Samoyeds who formed part of our crew of five men, having reached the village where they were employed, had already crept off into darkness, without the slightest intention of coming back. With great difficulty from want of light we managed between us to land the barrels, and then moved on, short-handed by the loss of two men.

CHAPTER VI

ARRIVAL AT UST TSILMA

SO far I have not told you much about our old steersman, Vasili; but as he was something of a character, I will try and repair that error now.

A small man, wearing long leather Russian boots, which were met by the skirt of a dirty skin *malitsa*, or coat, and girt round the waist with a leathern belt ornamented with brass nails, from which hung a Samoyed sheath-knife, there was little, except the boots, to distinguish him from a Samoyed, although he was really a Russian. His face was so much hidden by a fur hood that, beyond small twinkling eyes and a snub nose, no more of it, not even his mouth,

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could be seen. Sometimes I made him sing, and then he launched off into one of the extraordinary nasal chants that, among the northern Russians, do duty for a song. But the music came through the fur wrappers of his hood with a muffled, confidential sound, like a raven talking to himself, as you hear them in the Zoo. At night, too, he would sometimes start off of his own accord, and then he apparently freed his mouth, for he sang much more loudly, and it was not a little weird to hear, in the darkness, these barbaric cadences rising and falling in time to the oars.

Vasili's chief diversion lay in deluding me about distances. He did not do this maliciously, but by way of encouragement and to keep his charges in good tempers. At every group of huts we passed he would tell the distance from "Okshin" in versts (a verst is about three-quarters of a mile), and, according to his pronouncements, we were by this time two-thirds of the way to Ust Tsilma, whereas we had still, in fact, a three days'

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journey before us. The distance between the two towns was originally to have been 190 versts. But when we reached Kemovka, on Saturday, October 6th, Vasili, in the best of spirits, informed me we were doing very well, for we were now exactly half-way, and had "only 120 versts before us." This was at half-past eight in the morning, and now I told the men we would wait here and that they might go to sleep. But, instead of this, they went off to see their friends, and returned later on with evident symptoms of too much vodka drinking.

Kemovka, a village of some twenty huts, was full of dogs and salmon nets. The dogs, a fine jumble of curs, paid just as great respect to old Sailor's deep bass growl as the dogs used to do in Kolguev. Kemovka was remarkable for its well-set-up, handsome men. The women, who work in the room bare-legged, frequently went from house to house with no additional raiment, except a pair of loose wooden clogs, and yet seemed happy enough in spite of the freezing

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cold, for it had been freezing steadily now for days, and the ground rang like iron. The people here were charming and friendly, and all had a kind word to say. In one house I found the woman knitting in many colours, and the man making string for fishing-nets. A simpler contrivance for string-making could scarcely be devised. Pulling out strands from a bundle of tow, he twirled them in his fingers and wound them round a conical bit of wood. Then, fastening one end of the strands to the ceiling, he spun the wood between his fingers, drawing it downwards at the same time, and from this simple action resulted yards of fine-drawn twine, as even and as regularly formed as any you may buy in the shops at home. They were a well-to-do couple, owning four horses and four cows, and here, for the first time in our wanderings, we drank real new milk. Hyland, who had long ere this lost all interest in Russian life, was sleeping in the boat; but when I woke him up with the advice that he should come and have

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some new milk, he obeyed with amusing alacrity.

The desertion of the Samoyed boatmen now came home to me in a very unpleasant way. The Pechora, as we dropped lower down, became wider and shallower — so shallow, that often we could scarcely find any channel at all. Many times we ran aground, and more than once the united efforts of all on board failed to get the boat off again. At such times our steersman was inclined to give it up, and simply lie there until more water should come down. But this was not to be thought of ; yet, as we could not move the boat with our poles and oars, there was nothing for it but that I must myself pull on my long boots and get over the side, down into the Pechora. So doing, after much hard shoulder-work on my part in conjunction with the men's efforts with the poles, the boat was gradually edged off again into deeper water. When at last we struck a deeper channel close under the bank, the men were so exhausted that I was fain to let them go

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to sleep, while I landed and prowled in the forest.

The "silence of the great forest"! What a trite expression it has become! One would be led to think that the depth of the forest was a soundless, lifeless void. There is just a touch of truth in this, but more want of observation. He who only pushes on,—he whose ear has not been trained to listen nor his eye to catch the small, quick movements of wild animal life, may very well pass right through and out of the forest-land, haunted by an abiding sense of silence and solitude and almost death. But the man who has friends in the birds and other creatures may always find them if he will; and, indeed, if he knows their ways and how to keep them from alarm, many of them will come to meet him in a curiosity which seems half a companionship and half a resentment of intrusion.

Leave the village—our village of Kemovka for an instance—and wander straight back into the forest. Round about every

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little human centre, such as this, certain birds always gather, owning an existence semi-dependent upon man. The grey crows come here, keeping in flocks like the rooks in England, and searching every inch of ground for the smallest bits of food. Even in the village itself they cater absolutely without fear, sitting on the lines and picking the drying reindeer skins clean of every bit of fat or meat. They do no damage to the skins, and are therefore welcomed as very useful tanners. Magpies also share their interests, keeping in twos or threes or scarcely larger companies. They may haunt also the forest's fringe, but are never found far inside.

Entering the forest, the wind, which has so far blended all noises into one general chord, is suddenly shut off, and the village sounds fade out, as the trees and the distance kill them one by one. Human voices are the first to cease ; but for long after these have stopped comes the regular fall of hammer and axe ; then these are less and less, until nothing

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meets the ear but perhaps the fitful voice of a wandering dog, and then the village is lost entirely. This is the silent moment, just this of passing from the last touch of human care and interest to the unchallenged liberty of another though an ordered life. For life enough there is, ringed about not, in truth, with silence, but with a hush of suspended sound. It is as though the great guardian trees, which stand around, turn their backs to the clamour and the uglinesses of human things, and shoulder to shoulder close in a charmed exclusive ground, where the drama that has run on unchanging through all the centuries of outside change, is played and watched and lived unweariedly through the moonlights and the suns.

There is a little chucketing voice up in that old pine, which increases, with sharp jerky interludes, as you creep nearer through the fern. It is the silver squirrel, who, annoyed at your intrusion, challenges in this way the liberty you take. Should you remain quite still and affect indifference, he will run right

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down his tree trunk to about the level of your face, and stamp and jump in half-circles, with his tail over his back, very peppery and very valiant. The spotted woodpeckers also will come quite close to you, with their festoon-like flight, dropping with closed wings nearly to the ground from a neighbouring tree, and rising again till they are over your head, and clinging against the smooth trunk of the tree below which you stand. You must raise your face very slowly and then keep still. Then down they will come, first one and then the other, tripping and hammering in circles round the stem, till within a yard perhaps of your face. Then, with the wildest of most ringing laughs, they start off on a hunt as persistent to the next bit of promising bark.

But by far the most companionable bird in all the forest is the Siberian jay, who is scientifically the nearest ally of Whiskey Jack, the friend of the settlers on the Canadian side. Separated by the width of half the world, these two birds cannot have

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learnt from one another, yet their manners are the same. As soon as they find that a human being is about (and they very quickly discover it) they come round and talk to him as to an old friend. Quite close they come and fly from bough to bough of the nearest bushes, even hopping along the ground and taking any food he may put in their way. And all the while they are talking incessantly and with the most astonishing range of note. They are accomplished mimics, and not only treat you to the voices of many birds, but also pipe musically through the whole of the gamut.

On the 7th we pounded up our milk, for it was frozen solid, and such a gale blew from the north from noon on that day till midnight that the men were thoroughly beaten. I therefore sent two of them to sleep while I took my place at the oar, and directed Hyland to do the same. I was very glad to have this opportunity of giving Hyland some occupation, for the poor fellow had become thoroughly attacked by

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home-sickness and found the greatest difficulty in rousing himself, constantly sleeping during the day for many hours on end. Always a heavy man, he had become very fat from inactivity, and I was afraid of his getting ill.

Early the next morning I had to rouse the men again, for we had suddenly entered ice. Vasili said we had only twelve versts before us, but twelve versts were twelve too many if they meant that length of ice. However, it was not to be so bad as that, for we struggled with it for a mile or so, and then entered a strong open channel and made good way, until at last we came in sight of Ust Tsilma. Then, indeed, we met a barrier of ice which was like to prove an impassable obstacle.

This ice was from three to four inches thick, and every yard of it had to be broken for the boat. But we worked with a will and all together, and little by little we forced a passage through. A little crowd had collected at the landing-place to see our coming

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through the ice. We were there at last. Things did not look very encouraging for the rest of our journey, but at all events we had reached Ust Tsilma.

CHAPTER VII

A TOWN OF THE OLD BELIEVERS

AS soon as I had seen our boat safely moored, I went straight to the house of the *ispravnik*, or chief police official of the district, Mr. ———, and presented my credentials. Nothing could possibly have been kinder than the reception with which I met. I was so much ashamed of my imperfect Russian that it was with great satisfaction I found the *ispravnik* able to talk in French. After hearing my story he introduced me to his wife, a most amiable lady. The family was completed by two jolly little boys and an exceedingly fine Newfoundland dog.

The *ispravnik* held out little hope that we should be able to leave before the expiration of a month at least. The river with

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the ice in its present condition was almost impossible to cross, he said; and, even if we managed that, there was a second river beyond it—the Pizhma—which was running very rapidly, and, being filled with blocks of ice, would be exceedingly dangerous. Beyond this again were other rivers, and, what was almost worse, bogs and swamps for miles and miles, which would be absolutely impassable until the frost had thoroughly taken hold of them. “You must know,” he added, “that passage of every kind is suspended during this time, and that even the Government Postal Service is stopped.” It looked bad. By way of passing the time I went out through the snow, which fell heavily, and saw what I could of the town. It presents the usual collection of wooden houses, of rough streets and wooden sidewalks, characteristic of northern Russia, and the church with its crest of cupolas is the central feature that there it always is.

As this town is the centre of the Ras-kolniki (*i.e.* Schismatics), who call them-

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selves the Old Believers, you may like to hear something about this sect. Their *raskol*, or schism, originated in the celebrated Monastery of Solovetsk, which I myself visited in 1893. On that occasion I stayed there for some days, meeting with great kindness at the hands of the Archimandrite, who gave much of the information which follows. But first as to the monastery itself:—

In the lower third of the White Sea lies a group of small islands known as the “Solovetskii Isles,” and on the largest of these is situate what is now by far the most northerly monastery in the world. This monastery is self-supporting; its members number about three hundred, and in addition to these there are always another three hundred, or so, of lay workers, men who as a votive return for mercy during trouble or sickness are content to work there for periods of time—for a year perhaps or longer. They farm the islands, tend the cattle, do repairs, and furnish a crew for the steamers; for the mon-

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astery owns two little passenger steamers, which ply between the islands and Archangel, and is proud in the possession of its own dry dock. In spite of the fact that for some seven months or longer in each year their home is fast bound in big sea ice, the monks are apparently very cheerful and happy. They make beautiful pictures and images; they sell wooden spoons on which is a painting of their emblem, the *omyl* (*Salmo omul*), and of the Siberian herring-gull (*Larus affinis*), which nests about the place in numbers and is protected most religiously. These birds are so tame that I was able to pick up one in my arms, which had flown down to beg for food at the bakehouse door. I brought it alive to England, where it is flourishing now.

Solovetsk in the whole course of its history has been the subject of but two epoch-making disturbances; that which I will first touch upon (though it is by far the more recent) was its bombardment by the British during the Crimean War.

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On July 17th, 1854, the British gun-boats *Brisk* and *Miranda*, under the command of Admiral (now Sir Erasmus) Ommaney, after having spent a month over evolutions in the White Sea, came to an anchor off Solovetsk. "On anchoring," says Admiral Ommaney's report, "some field artillery guns with a body of troops emerged from the wood lying between the monastery and the beach, and exchanged shots with the *Miranda*, upon which I sent to demand the surrender of all military stores. This was met with a refusal; in consequence the place was bombarded for five hours, but at a long range, it being impossible to approach within 1000 yards, as it is built at some distance from the beach." And a little further on in the same account: "We endeavoured to advance the *Miranda* into the creek that leads up to the monastery, but found it too intricate for a ship of her dimensions; and only succeeded in getting her abreast of Peci, or Rock Island, in effecting which she grounded twice; from this position some

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shells were thrown into the fort at a range of 1200 yards. Finding that my time and resources were inadequate for the reduction of the place, I proceeded for Onega." Such is a sailor's laconic account of an affair which was a very serious matter to the poor monks. Many of the bombs fired then have been carefully preserved, fixed in the walls of the refectory, the guest house, and elsewhere where they struck. One especially which struck the painted Madonna over the cathedral door made a considerable hole, which is there still, and to this the faithful point as evidence of the Holy Mother's protection. This was the last shot fired, and the legend under it runs :—

“ ‘Call upon Me in the day of trouble.’

“The Heavenly Mother defended the Solovetsk Obitel during a nine hours' bombardment by the English, and was pleased to receive in the ikon a blow from a 96-pound ball; this last shot was fired while ringing for Vespers, July 7th, 1854. Mother of God, vouchsafe victory over his



A CORNER OF THE FOREST ON SOLOVETSK.

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enemies to our Tsar, that we may in his peace live in all piety and purity.”¹

The other disturbance to which I have referred is the inception of that schism which gave rise to the Old Believers and many other sects. In order to understand this clearly, a slight sketch of the history of the monastery seems necessary.

It dates from about the middle of the sixteenth century—the days of Basil the Black. A certain monk named Savoatii, going in search of solitude, met on the shores of the White Sea one Hermann, also of pious mind. Together they crossed to the Solovetskii Isles, which were then apparently inhabited by fishing folk, where Hermann deserted his companion and disappeared. After a time Savoatii, old and dying, despatched a companion, Zosima, to find Hermann. He succeeded. They recrossed together to Solovetsk and founded a re-

¹ Translation as given in Mr. Boddy's *With Russian Pilgrims*, a charming little book.

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ligious retreat, where they laid the "un-corrupted remains" of old Savoatii. After some fifty years of labour Zosima died, leaving behind him a well - established monastery, destined to hold a unique dignity in Russia, and so wealthy that at the time of the Crimean War it was able to send for protection to Moscow treasure amounting to £200,000 sterling. Great glory came to Solovetsk in the days of Ivan the Terrible, when its Superior, Filip the monk, was raised to be Metropolitan of Moscow and all Russia. This is that St. Philip the Martyr who was afterwards slain by an emissary of the Tsar who had raised him to his dignity, for daring, like John Baptist, to reprove the ruler for misdeeds, which in this instance were cruel raids upon innocent poor. Then about the middle of the seventeenth century, Nikon became Archimandrite of Solovetsk, and, like St. Philip, was elevated to be Metropolitan of all Russia. He removed the remains of St. Philip from Solovetsk, whither they had been taken all the way

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from Moscow, back again to the Uspenskii Cathedral in Moscow, where they remain to this day. But a small part of these relics were allowed to remain behind in Solovetsk, where they still lie in a splendid shrine.

In the course of ages the old Greek service books had become much changed from their original form. Many additions had crept into the liturgy, which had there no authoritative place. It seemed to Nikon that the time had come for the old purer form of the services to be restored. He therefore went back to old Greek and Slavonic manuscripts, and finally shaped the form of Office-book which the Greek Church uses to-day. But when the revised books were sent to Solovetsk, some of the illiterate monks regarded them as an innovation, and absolutely declined to receive them. Out of this act grew endless dissensions, and finally open rebellion against authority, which for a time put the monastery into a state of siege. The outcome of this was the direct secession of the Old Believers, who

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have since subdivided into many sects, and number many thousands who are scattered over high northern Russia.

It so chanced that our friend the ispravnik, in talking of Kolguev, told me that he had heard that the Samoyeds had a tradition of a king on that island. I was naturally anxious to hear something more of this, whereupon he kindly sent out to see if any one could be found in the town who could speak the Samoyed language. To my great astonishment not one could be found. It was strange indeed. In the whole of Ust Tsilma there was not one person who could talk Samoyed, or knew anything worth hearing about their ways or traditions ; and yet in Askinö, but those few miles away, every one could speak that tongue, and the interests of the village were at least as greatly Samoyed as Russian. Samoyeds would come later on, we were told, but they remained outside the town for the most part, and at any rate they were only visitors, a people apart, and no one saw much of their life. When I told my friend

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the ispravnik how long we had lived with them, of their great ethnological interest, and of the kindness we had met with at their hands, it was amusing to see the surprise with which this new point of view struck him. All these years he had been looking on the Samoyeds as dirty, trampish, necessary evils, but now he said he already felt a distinct interest in them, and was quite impatient for them to return; and that, in short, for the future he should devote much time to the study of the Samoyed.

The following morning (with only a light breeze from the east, and the thermometer risen to 9° Celsius) broke in a flood of sunshine, and quite determined me on having a good try, at all events, at beginning the journey home. My kind friend did all he could to dissuade me from the attempt. If I would stay just until the snow came, we would go out into the forest together and hunt for wolves and bears, and a few weeks would go very pleasantly in such pursuits. I little knew, he urged, the difficulties before

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me ; for even if we crossed the river, such a journey lay beyond as no one used to the country would ever dream of attempting at such a time. " Wait at least till the swamps are frozen, and then you can go easily and quickly in sleighs over the snow, as your Englishman Jackson did, whom I remember seeing here." I need scarcely say that, had I been alone, nothing would have pleased me better. But there was my promise to Hyland, and so I turned a deaf ear to all allurements.

When once our host saw that I was determined on starting, nothing could exceed the kindness he spent upon our case. The hospitality of this good couple had been most unsparing, and now they won my gratitude by an act I can never forget ; for, on learning that the stopping of the post entirely prevented me from getting any money, they insisted on my taking 100 roubles from themselves, asking only a promise of repayment in return. I have often thought since what a remarkable test of

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trust and kind-heartedness this was. The pay of these police officials is not great, and my friend could ill afford to risk such a sum. Yet they lent it to a perfect stranger, and lent it with evident pleasure.

A new way had lately been cleared which hit the old Archangel trail at about 100 versts from the start. This, it seemed, was the best for us to try. But, in order to reach the finished part of this road, it would be necessary to take rough sleighs with us, and after the passage of the Pechora and Tsilma rivers to go across country for about sixteen versts till we reached the first post-station, or, to use the Russian name, *stantsya*.

In the village were two peasants, Yakoff Larevornoff and his son Nicholai, who had come in from the forest, and had been stopped in Ust Tsilma, surprised by the sudden forming of the ice. They were now waiting till the river should be frozen firm enough for a passage; for their home lay on the other side. When they heard about us, and understood that they would be well paid

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for their trouble, the plucky fellows were ready to risk a trial of the crossing.

We should have to take sleighs and horses with us ; and the difficulty was to find horses which would be quiet in the boat, for the boat would be heavily laden, and we should have quite enough work with the ice, let alone a couple of frightened horses. In the course of the morning, however, two horses, a sorrel and a brown, were found, who certainly seemed staid enough. And now the ispravnik showed once again his kindness of thought. Attached to his person was a semi-policeman, one Yagor, which is George. He was really not a policeman, but a *ras-silni*, which, as well as I could gather, meant a sort of beadle. This man our kind friend insisted on sending with us part of the way. "For," said he, "there is no settled service yet on this new route, and he will be able to arrange for you about horses and wheels. He can leave you at Koinas, for there you hit the old track and should have no further trouble in that respect. Only I think you

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will find, after your first day's experience, that you have already had enough of it, and will recognise the hopelessness of trying to go on. But I have promised to help you, and will do all I possibly can." What could have been kinder ?

The police system of the country districts needs a word of explanation. The *ispravnik*, as I have before said, is the head officer for the whole district. Under him are two commissioners called *stanovoi*, and immediately responsible to them comes their sergeant—*sotskii*. Every village has its constable, or *desyatskis*, and Yagor I always supposed to be a species of *desyatskis*, for he clearly belonged to the class from which they are drawn, being in fact a most ignorant mujik. The police districts are very big in Russia ; indeed, the *ispravnik* of Ust Tsilma told me his district was "twice as large as France."

We left. Down to the edge of the river we went : horses, sleighs, and quite a procession ; for I think before our preparations

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were finished, nearly the whole of Ust Tsilma must have been there. It must, no doubt, have seemed a mad thing to these quiet northerners. Hurry is an unknown word to them, its equivalent in Russian is only used in horse-driving. "The river would be safe enough for traffic, and the bogs be solid in a month or so; why on earth should people want to risk their lives for the sake of gaining a little time? Truly these Englishmen are mad." Our peasants also were the butt of much chaff and of more remonstrance, but they pluckily stuck to their guns. We loaded the boats with the greatest care, and with every heed to balance and trim. Amidship we stored our baggage and the sleighs, and aft of this we made the horses stand. I have called them horses, but these northern horses do not run higher than about fourteen hands. They entered the boat quietly enough, for they were well used to going by water, and in spite of all that followed they fortunately remained quite still; only they humped up their backs,

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trembled a little, and closed their noses quite tight, as horses will when they do not feel secure. And then our men declared themselves ready. At the last moment I persuaded them to change the long oars of the boat for short strong sculls, which would be far handier to use.

The men quite agreed that these would be better ; but when I suggested that we ought also to take some good strong poles, they raised many objections, saying that these would prove quite useless and only lie in the way. I felt it was but natural that these local peasants should resent a foreigner coming and presuming to teach them the way to tackle their own river ; but I was not to be moved from my point. Sitting down on the boat's gunwale, I sent Yagor to get poles, and forbade him to return without them. He was gone a long while, but eventually returned with four good, stout poles of pine.

At length all was ready, and among the hearty farewells of our friends we shoved away. The passage of the Pechora was not

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more difficult than our entry of the day before. The ice, it is true, was a little thicker, but we broke it without difficulty and progressed well enough until we came abreast of the point of land which separates the Pechora from the Pizhma River that runs into it here. Here things looked very doubtful, and the men were for turning back. The Tsilma, deep and very rapid, was also swirling down in a threatening manner, packed with great masses of broken ice, which ground against each other and spun round and round and looked as if they would crack us like a nut. It would be evidently impossible to cross to the usual landing-place, but my glass showed me a point some half-mile further down which seemed to offer a fair landing. The danger was lest, getting entangled in the ice, we should be carried down past this point to where the banks are straight and steep, and run on so for many a mile.

We all fought hard and with a will. We shoved here and hung on there, and fended

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off the charging ice. We could not all work on the same side of the boat at once, though often the occasion seemed to demand it, because her gunwale was down to the water's level.

It was well, indeed, that we had brought the poles, or we should never have crossed at all. Work of this kind demands constant watchfulness and instant action. The strong current, the huge river-floes which came swirling down, grinding their sides together, and piling themselves up against any obstacle, were foes not to be lightly met. Often it was exceedingly difficult to keep the boat under any control, the shock of the ice blocks making it all but impossible to retain one's grip on the poles. At last we began to approach the further shore, and, as the current here ran doubly strong, it really seemed as though we should miss our mark and be carried helplessly down. It now became a question of most careful judgment as to what lead in the ice we should follow, for we had little room to spare and might easily be en-

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trapped. It was impossible to see clearly, with the boat so low in the water. So I resigned my pole to Hyland, who had been keeping an eye on the horses hitherto, and climbed up to the top of the pile of sleighs, hay, and baggage which lay amidships, and issued orders from there: "*Na prava!*" (to the right); "*Na lieva!*" (to the left), and so on. But the men were getting tired, and though I had encouraged them all I could, I must confess I was very glad when we had fought our way to the last lead of water and there were but a few yards between us and the bank. I was in constant apprehension also lest the horses should begin to plunge and upset our crank craft; but fortunately they behaved well, seeming to be quiet through fear. At last the nose of the boat touched the ice fringe of the bank: one man jumped out with the painter, the boat swung round in the current, and rested so. We had considerable trouble in landing the horses and baggage; but by breaking the ice and getting the boat nearer in, we succeeded in this at last.

CHAPTER VIII

RASPUTNYA

ONCE past the rivers, we loaded up the sleigh and set off for the peasants' home. We were not to reach it without several mishaps. Track there was none ; we went through the forest as best we could, and what with winding through the trees, clearing away fallen timber, and mending the harness, which was very rotten and broke several times, we had plenty of incident. Once we trusted the ice of a small river, which broke and let us through ; but it was not deep, so there was nothing worse than a wetting, yet this was unpleasant enough in that cold weather. We were not sorry to reach the peasants' hut, where all our things could thaw and dry. Let me describe the

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hut of a Russian peasant. We shall see a good deal of them before we have done, and one is much like another.

Built of logs, that is of pine trees trimmed of their branches and cut into suitable lengths, the corners of the walls are dovetailed, with a foot or more to spare, so that these ends stand out in a V shape at the corners. A groove is run along under each log until it fits more or less closely upon the one on which it lies. Each log is then dropped into place upon a bed of dry bog-moss, which fills up any chink against the cold. The roof is of birch-bark covered with sods, and supports in summer a fine crop of grass and flowers. Inside are two rooms : an outer, where the oven is, and a small inner chamber, where the master and mistress sleep. Every one else sleeps in the outer compartment, some on the top of the oven and some upon the floor. There is nothing in this room beyond some wooden settles, a table, and some shelves. If the peasant is rich enough to keep a cow, you will find up in the rafters

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a set of wooden bowls filled with sour cream, much the same as our Devonshire junket. The Russians call it *smetana*, the Norwegians *remicolle*, and the Swedes *filli bonke*, and it is a standing fare of the peasantry in these northern countries.

The heat in this hut (as it is in them all) was overpowering ; and the smoke hung so heavily about the upper part of the room that the one tallow candle only seemed to intensify the darkness. A conversation was carried on with those on the top of the oven for some time before I could distinguish any one there ; but two boys now came down from that retreat to make way for the newcomers. They were surprised that I would not go up. But I had tried an oven-top before, and knew too much about it.

The oven, or *paitch*, is a great feature in all these small Russian dwellings. So wedded is a Russian trader or peasant to his oven, that even when going off to the sealing grounds in old days, bricks were carried by boat from Russia, so that the oven could be

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built on landing. In Spitsbergen, for example, as I have myself seen, the sites of the old Russian sealers' temporary huts are still marked by the ruined brick ovens brought there a century or more ago. These ovens are domed inside, and are usually not closed by any door. The top is flat, and so large that five or six men can comfortably lie there. One learns to be very cautious on first entering an apparently empty room, lest some one should be hidden away upon the dark oven top and overhear any personal remarks.

The men on entering did not forget to bow and cross themselves before the little smoke-stained *ikon*, which occupied one corner, for their safe deliverance from water and ice. Then began a clamorous chatter about our adventures and our future plans, which was prolonged until a late hour. Not a person in the hut, except one, but was agreed that the journey we were taking was absolute madness, and that we should not stand a chance of getting further than the second stantsyia,

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if as far as that. Only Yagor the beadle was very much on his dignity, as became the representative of the ispravnik, and several times he said to me, "You will tell the Governor when you reach Archangel that I have done well; yes, very well?" I promised that I should do so if indeed he did do well, but was careful to add, "But we have not got there yet." To this Yagor protested that it was as good as done if he were with us; that he was as the ispravnik himself, and all had to do exactly as he commanded, with much to the same effect; which would have been very comforting but that he blustered too much for me. I reflected that a man who made so noisy a show of his authority when there was no occasion for it, was likely to find his influence worthless when the occasion came. There seemed too much altogether of the tap-room boaster about our friend Yagor, and events will show that I was not wrong.

It was during our stay in this hut that I first began to notice the use of that

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mysterious word which forms the heading of this chapter. Never again, I hope, shall I hear it, or never at least in the same case. I learnt it very gradually, and its full meaning was only driven home thoroughly by the repeated blows of hard struggle. At first it cropped up at intervals in the men's conversation, like plums in a school pudding. Then, as argument waxed hotter, it was bandied about from one to the other with every gesture and facial twist that could be marshalled to express hopelessness, impossibility, mania itself. Finally, and often all along the road, it was hurled at my obstinate British head as the one immeasurable, insuperable fact. At first I was utterly at sea about this remarkable word. Who or what was this "Rasputnya," that he or it should bar my way? Was he a big, very big official, or a brigand perhaps, or was it an edict forbidding traffic on the ispravnik's new track?

It was none of these. "Rasputnya," as I have been since informed, means literally "the separation of the roads," but by some

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process of thought has now come to be the term for a fifth season,—for the time which lies between autumn and winter ; in short, for the month of October. It means in northern Russia that the first frosts have thawed and the first snows melted ; that the rivers are blocked with streams of broken ice, the morasses like a quagmire, the tracks, where any advance has been attempted upon old forest-bog, a mixture of treacle and glue. Finally, it means, as I have said before, that no one then dreams of trying to move until the country is sound and hard under the settled frost.

These facts made no difference to me. I had long ago learnt, like the Celestials, the one argument to which everything must yield. So, when they were fiercest, I only smiled, and repeated the formula, "I am going on." "What are you doing?" they would say, emerging from a bout of vodka drinking to find that I had harnessed the horses and was moving off. "I am going on." Or, again, when they had tried their hardest,

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making a dead set, as they sometimes did, against our moving another step, with "Impossible ; no man can move now ; no horse can move," I would meet it with the same invincible argument—a smile and "I am going on." On the whole, these tactics won the day, though, once at least, facts were too strong even for them. But this you shall presently see.

On the following day we were all up early, and, after a taste of hard bread and sour cream, ready to start for the Popoffsk stantsyia, the first on the "new road." We reached this place in the course of the afternoon, but not without some mishaps. The most serious of these was at the Tsilma River.

This river, which is wide and rapid, was laden with heavy ice. It looked so forbidding, and the boat was so low down in the water, that it was evidently too risky to try and take our three ponies over at once. We therefore put two sleighs and two ponies on board, and left the third—a grey—tied up

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till it could be fetched. In order to clear the ice, we were obliged to make a diagonal crossing, which landed us, at last, under a high, steep bank, up which we had great difficulty in hauling the sleighs, baggage, and horses. The horses could get no foothold on the frozen sides of the cliff, and stood helplessly just where we had landed them, afraid to move for fear of slipping right down into the stream, for they were not roughed. The peasants looked on helplessly, and even Yagor the boaster protested that there was no chance of taking the horses farther, and that we must get back into the boats again and recross. I was, however, quite determined not to yield without an effort. With considerable difficulty I scrambled up to the top of the cliff. Here I found some small aspen trees growing, and it at once struck me that it might be just possible to pass a rope round these and haul the horses up. What ropes had we for the purpose? There were those which bound the baggage, and many yards of long Samoyed thongs of raw seal hide, which

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I had brought from Kolguev, and the heavy rope reins of the sleighs. The ropes were new, and I knew I could, at any rate, trust the seal hide, for often I had swung in a reindeer sleigh over the sloping side of a snow bank, entirely dependent on these strips of hide, and I had never known one to break. So I told the men I should not dream of turning back, but that we should get the horses up with these. I myself adjusted the gear round the smaller horse's girth, making a sort of breastplate, so that it could not slip, and then, climbing to the top of the cliff, passed the cable, now formed of rope and leather, round the nearest tree trunk, and made the men lay hold. Then I got down again, took hold of the horse, and gave the signal to haul, while I urged the animal to start. The poor brute looked round appealingly, and tried several times to bolt down. But with every plunge he was hauled a little higher up, and, to make a long story short, after a time of great anxiety (for it looked as if the thongs must part when he

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hung back), he was half hauled, half struggled up to the cliff edge, and over it on to the flat. His fellow, by the same method, was eventually landed without any other mishap than scraped knees. I can even now scarcely understand how this was managed so successfully, but there is wonderful magic in "needs must." So far all was well. But worse was to follow. This occurred in the passage of the grey horse.

Our river bank was so high, that from it we had a good bird's-eye view of the river. We could see the ice masses and the open channels as in a map. On the whole, the ice, which was massed in whirling streams, seemed to keep together, and to preserve fairly well its relation to the open water. Some little distance above where we stood there was evidently a wide, clear passage moving down, so to say, which, if carefully navigated, could take a boat safely over. Yakoff, the peasant, said it was simple enough; he and his son would go across and fetch the grey horse. So they went.

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Working up against the stream, they broke their way through a thin skim of new ice and reached the open channel. It was shaped like a horse-shoe, and they followed it round, falling with it down and down the river. At last they reached the further bank, some quarter of a mile or so below where the grey horse was tethered. We saw them go up the bank, and get the grey horse and lead him and put him in the boat.

They started to come back. For a time they got on well, working up against the stream, through loose ice or any little open lead. But we, from our vantage point, could see what they could not. They entered a wide bit of open water, which doubtless seemed to them to promise a safe way over. We knew they were entering a *cul de sac*, and a very bad one. For this open lead narrowed down to come to an end just where the ice was heaviest and worst, right in the middle of the current. Here, the great blocks were spinning round and round, churning their sides together till the powdered *débris* was

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piled on their backs like heaps of snow ; and when they spun into a chink, they set together and froze, going down the stream in a solid mass—a pack in miniature.

We shouted, we waved our hands, we did all that men could do ; but either they could not hear for the noise of the ice and the distance from us, or they thought their plan was best. For a moment or two they were battling with the ice floes, and the next the boat was caught and wedged into a hollow space. Floe after floe came down upon her, and she was in the heart of the ice. There was nothing to be done. The men who had handled her could do nothing, and we of course could not help. The boat, the men, and the grey horse were carried down the stream.

My first impulse was to take a long rope and follow down the bank. But this proved to be beyond my power. The forest was impassable, except at crawling pace. The snow lay in it in great drifts, and everywhere were lying fallen trees in piled confusion. After

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struggling on for a little distance through all these impediments, I was most reluctantly obliged to give it up. There was nothing for it but to leave the boat to its fate, and struggle on ourselves to the Stantsyia Popoffsk, from which we might send help. But who could tell where the boat might be by then? And, as I thought of it, I felt much troubled for those two poor fellows; for if we five had barely managed to defeat the heavy ice, how would things go with them? However, there was nothing whatever to be done, and all that was left was to hope for the best. That, for the present, was the end of the two peasants and the grey horse.

CHAPTER IX

HEADING FOR HOME

AFTER some hard travelling through the forest, we came out on the new track. Before I explain what a far-northern Russian "road" is like, let us get clear about the *tundra*, for I often find this word used in a rather vague way by friends at home.

For some four thousand miles along the shores of the Arctic Ocean runs a tract of land, about five hundred miles at its deepest from north to south. An absolutely treeless waste, lichened, swampy, intersected by streams—this is the true tundra. It is peopled only by nomadic reindeer races, to the west the Samoyeds, about the Ob the Ostiaks or Habi, and far to the east the Chukchis. Below these on the forest line

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are the Tungus to the west, and lower still and nearer Manchuria the Orotchis or Fish-skin Tartars. These roughly represent the nomadic races of northern Russia. But now, as far as our own journey went, we had done with the tundra proper; and from Ust Tsilma went west, partly on the fringe where tundra and forest met, but for by far the greater distance through forest land.

There are two main ways by which you can cover the distance between Ust Tsilma and Archangel. The first, the old way, takes you partly by water up the Tsilma and down the Mezen rivers, and so through Pinega; the other is by a southern route which runs to Pinega, and into which the new track opens at Koinas, 250 versts from Ust Tsilma. As the White Sea would now be closed by ice, we should have to travel on to Vologda before we could hit the railway; so there still lay before us $1,581\frac{1}{2}$ versts, or over one thousand English miles. It is quite clear that no Government could

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make a hard, beaten road through the thinly populated districts of these immense distances. What the Russian Government has done is this :—Along a given track it has cut down the forest trees, set ferry boats on the big streams, or corduroy bridges over the small ones, and where the ground is more than usually swampy, has laid layers of pine trees side by side. A “corduroy” bridge, as you probably know, is formed by the simple plan of throwing two tall trees across a stream, and laying shorter lengths transversely on them. A road such as this is admirable in winter, when the swamps are frozen hard, and when its roughnesses have disappeared under a hard, thick coating of snow. In the summer, also, it may become fairly good, for then the ground is dry. But in October it is simply a slough, so bad that the traveller must often turn off for considerable distances into the forest itself.

At intervals along the road the Government put up log buildings called *stantsyas*. They are at variable distances apart. Be-

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tween Ust Tsilma and Archangel, for example, there are thirty-nine of these.

The post stations are in charge of a *yamshstchik* (or driver), who is bound to supply horses and conveyances for travellers on production of a printed permission called a *podorojna*. But such Government contracts are all off during the month of October, as I found out to my cost. This month is a month of idleness, or, as the Russian peasants say, of *srok*. That I was able to travel at all during the time was due to the fact that I was armed with special papers. It was by the merest good fortune that I was possessed of these. As I had left England with the single intention of going to the desolate island of Kolguev and back again by sea, it might have seemed unnecessary to take even an ordinary passport. But I had felt so strongly the wisdom of being provided against any emergency, that I had taken the trouble to make a voyage in a timber boat the whole way from England to the White Sea in the previous year to get what credentials I could.

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Travelling in out-of-the-way Russia is not easy, and who knows, I had thought, but that we may be lost in the ice and find ourselves on the Russian mainland. The papers which I carried, in addition to a most kind letter from M. de Staal, were two official documents in the nature of "passes" for the road. The first, coloured white, is chiefly worth noticing for the quaint entry, "greasing of the wheels." I am not sure that the phrase is not intended to cover all necessary services by the way. In this sense the "wheels" on the journey did indeed require a severe amount of "greasing."

CERTIFICATE.

The bearer of this, a member of the Linnean and Zoological Societies of London, A. Trevor-Battye, is travelling through the Pechora country, and on the basis of the ordinances of the Minister of the Interior of the 21st of September, 1874, the keepers of post-houses are instructed to let him have post-horses preferentially before travellers journeying on private business, and this without demanding payment for luggage or the greasing of the wheels.



Government-town of Archangel,

13 *September*, 1893,

GOVERNOR (*signature*).

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The second document, coloured red, was of more importance, for it was one which is only granted as a rule to high Russian officials. It ran as follows :—

II.

(A REGULATION.)

FOR THE OFFICIAL POST-RATE.

Open Letter.

Ministry of the Interior.

*From the Governor of
Archangel.*

In the Chancelry.

13 September, 1893,

No. 1918

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Town of Archangel.

The bearer of this, a member of the Linnean and Zoological Societies of London, A. Trevor-Battye, is entitled, on his journey through the Pechora country, to take from the district and settlers' stations two horses at a time, with a driver for the official postal-rate without delay. Which I confirm by my signature, and by affixing the seal of State.

GOVERNOR (*signed*).

For the Official Post-Rate (Regulation).



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As soon as we drew into more settled districts, these documents were carefully studied by any to whom they were shown in moments of difficulty. But in the far north the scholarship of the peasantry was not equal to this task ; and the Government seal had to produce what impression it might unaided.

To return to the Stantsyia Popoffsk. We had a consultation with the yamshstchik there about the men and the grey horse. It seemed that nothing could be done. There was just hope that the boats might be extricated in the neighbourhood of the crossing of the main track, in which case they would not be long in coming back. But if the boat had been carried beyond this point it would scarcely be worth while to wait, for the men, even if they were not lost altogether, as was quite possible, would have a difficult forest journey, and might not arrive for a long time.

However, about midnight, while we waited and talked, we heard a shout outside, and on

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going out found the two peasants just coming up, followed at a little distance by the grey horse, going very lame.

This was their story. Down with the ice they had gone, all their efforts to hack a way out proving ineffective. But after a while the ice floes round the boat became frozen together and safe to stand on. Then they got out of the boat on to the ice, and pushing with their oars against other floes, and helped by the diagonal current, they succeeded in working this mass of ice which surrounded the boat nearer the land, until at last it became wedged with a great accumulation of packed ice which set against the river bank. Then they drove the grey horse on to the ice, and made for shore themselves. The grey found his own way across, jumping most cleverly from floe to floe. All at length reached land, though the horse had cut his fetlock badly against the sharp edge of the ice. The boat was lost, for no sooner had they reached land than the whole mass of ice loosened and floated down the stream,



CAUGHT IN THE ICE.

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taking the boat with it. They might well congratulate themselves on a fortunate escape.

Old Sailor was the only one of the three who did not regret the delay, for I had filled up the evening by hunting for Arctic hares, and the old dog's pleasure at being free once more to follow his tastes was delightful to see. Before settling down to work, he careered about wildly in the snow.

We set out pretty early on the day following with four sleighs and four horses. At starting, all went well ; the sleighs, though heavily and clumsily built, ran over the snow easily enough. But this was not to last long. The wind went round, the sun came out, and in less than three hours we were in a slough. Towards evening it was worse. Over a great part of the track the snow had nearly melted. The ispravnik who was responsible for this new road had tried to make it a particularly superior one, by throwing down for long distances about a foot of glue-like clay. This half thawed, and now

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freezing again, accumulated on the sleigh-runners until the horses could not pull the sleighs at all. Everything had to be removed while the sleighs were turned over and the runners cleaned. This could only be done with the axe; and the process had to be repeated every few hundred yards. So you will not be surprised to learn that, though the distance from station to station was but sixteen versts (or about twelve English miles), it took us the whole of a day of hard toil to cover it.

There was no bedstead of any kind in this stantsyia. Going to bed involved nothing more than the simple operation of lying down upon the floor and going to sleep. But there was nothing new in this, and it was not long before, the story of the boat being well worn out, my various companions were snoring, and I writing up my diary by a dimly shining "dip"; this done, I too curled up. There was no stable, and the poor horses stood outside without even a cloth, and as I lay I could hear them

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munching at their hay ; for a rough kind of hay had been made round the stantsyia, and stood there in little stacks.

Early the next morning we started again, having filled the sleighs with a large quantity of hay for the horses ; for they said we should find none for a long distance now. Yagor the boaster was a sorry man this day, and incapable of lending the slightest help. He had contrived, unknown to me, to bring with him a small keg of vodka ; and the results of his attention to this, though they were on the sly, soon became irritatingly apparent. At first he was very boisterous and boastful, and without doing a stroke of work himself treated the peasants as though they were dirt. I took little notice of this for some time ; perhaps, I thought, it is the usual Russian way. But at last he became insolent to myself, so I knocked him down in the snow ; and then he got up and was quieter for a while. He kept behind with the last sleigh, and had, therefore, every chance for sticking to the bottle,

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which I afterwards found hidden under the hay with which the bottom of the sleigh was filled. But I knew nothing of this; and it was not until I turned back to see what was wrong with the sleigh, which dragged behind, that I found the gallant Yagor prone and fast asleep inside. So I pitched him out into the clay and left him. He was a big man, and very heavy, and the peasants were afraid to help me—for to lay a hand upon a uniformed official in Russia is a very serious offence—but by getting Hyland to tilt up the sleigh a bit, I worked Yagor on to the edge of the frame, and then he tipped over quite easily into the mud. The cold evening air eventually woke him up, and he overtook us at the next station in the course of the night.

The following morning opened warm and muggy. Being very anxious to start, I got the men up at 2.30 a.m., and we made some tea. The men, as before, did all they could to prevent my moving, and a sort of war council was held which lasted fully an hour.

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It was only by harnessing the teams myself, and making a show of starting, that by 6.30 we got under way with our sleighs; but I gained little by this effort, for after a mile or two we found it impossible to proceed, and were compelled to go back again and change the sleighs for a couple of tarantasses. Four kinds of vehicles are used upon these tracks, and three of them are machines which have evidently been evolved from forest conditions. One peculiarity is common to the three, namely this, that a minimum of metal is used in their construction, and they can therefore be repaired with an axe from the nearest tree as often as they break down; which in our case was always once, and often several times, on the journey. A tarantass is a four-wheeled vehicle. Above the wooden axle-trees are stout wooden block-frames, connected by two rough-hewn poles. On these is laid a willow or pine-wood cradle, about eight feet long. Over one end of the cradle is a canvas hood. The traveller's belongings

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are packed into the bottom of the cradle, and are covered with hay, on the top of which the traveller lies. Three horses pull this contrivance: one in the shafts (long poles, fastened by withies), and carrying the high collar-frame with its bells, the others right and left, and able to move very freely, since the outer ropes, which serve as traces, are attached to that part of the axle which projects beyond the box of the wheels. In front of the cradle is a little box, on which the yamshstchik sits, wrapped up in his sheepskin *caftan* or coat, and fur-hooded against the cold.



CHAPTER X

A CHAPTER OF ACCIDENTS

OUR two tarantasses were a dismal failure, and only of use for the baggage, for we were still obliged to walk. A laden tarantass was more than its three horses could successfully draw, let alone the added weight of a passenger. A long bit of the track, as I have said before, had, under the ispravnik's orders, been covered with stiff clay, and the wheels were so heavily clogged every few yards that they would not turn. From the last stantsyia to the next was twenty-one miles, a formidable distance under the circumstances. Imagine trying to drive a heavily-laden carriage, sometimes across miles of sodden ploughed land in the Weald of Kent, sometimes through miles of

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New Forest bog, and you will have a fair idea of our experience.

For a time we struggled gamely on ; the horses were fresh, and bad as the road was, what with hauling, shoving, and levering the wheels, we managed to get along. But very soon we were brought up short by a total collapse.

The way had become so hopelessly bad that there was nothing for it but to turn off into the forest. Fortunately we had an axe with us, so I kept a little ahead, and cleared a way by throwing some of the smaller trees. This went on for some time. As long as the horses could be kept in hand, it was always possible to steer round bad places and the big trees. When they became nervous in the soft ground, or plunged badly as the tarantass hung back against a stump, they were apt to bring the wheels against fallen trees, or into water holes, with disastrous consequences. Three times already a tarantass had been in this way completely overturned, and much time been

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lost in righting it and collecting all the things that were scattered about. At one of these crises the off-horse snapped his trace and his collar-check, and was off at a gallop into the forest. A stern chase at last brought us up to him, sunk in a bog-hole and absolutely unable to move. The yamshstchiki, after a cursory inspection, shook their heads sagaciously, and declared that his case was hopeless. It was curious to see how readily they yielded to the inevitable, as they deemed it; the prospect of losing a horse seemed to trouble them little. The fact is they were tired, and gladly welcomed the chance of a good long sleep; what was to come after they neither knew nor cared. But I was not going to lose a horse without an effort. As they could not, or would not, understand my meaning, I found my way back to the tarantass, unhitched the two horses, brought these up, and having with some difficulty reached the prisoner, for the ground was very treacherous, I fastened his companions to him with

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extra ropes, and, to make a long story short, they hauled him out.

Our next mishap was rather of a more serious kind. We had got back again on to the track, when the leading tarantass became fixed in the deepest of clay. We dug it out with considerable difficulty, and after that I saw clearly that we must resort to some other device if we were to get on at all that day. We therefore unhitched two of the horses from the second tarantass and attached them to the one in front, and so with five horses we were able to make some half a mile at a time ; then, taking out four of these, we led them back to where the second vehicle was standing, and brought that also on. The difficulty in such cases is to induce all the horses to pull together. Three times the leaders, snatching unexpectedly at the rope-traces, broke away. On a fourth trial they all started together, but with direful results. A plunge, a strain, a furious struggle, and the tarantass parted into two halves. The box, the front wheels, and the cradle

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dragged along the ground, but the back wheels remained forlornly fast in the mud, while the wood-work connecting them was smashed in half. Had this happened out in the open, it would have been a very serious matter ; but fortunately we were in the forest, so wood was plentiful. The construction of a tarantass (which is all of wood) admits of simple repair. In among the trees we went with the axe, and after about a couple of hours' work the old machine was set to rights, and off we went again. By pursuing these tactics, we managed to get along literally by inches (for we did not move nearly as quickly as a plough), until our yamshstchiki judged we were only some five miles or so from the next stantsyia. But it was clear that the horses required food and rest, and in their present condition should no more be asked to do five miles, and such a five, than a hundred. We were all pretty tired, for we had now been at it since the break of day. I had really worked harder than any one else, for I had com-

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bined in myself precept and initiative with example. Our yamshstchiki, moreover, were very poor things on their feet, and had no idea beyond driving from the box, and Yagor was in every way worse than useless ; so that every device for extricating the tarantasses and for urging on the teams had fallen on my own shoulders. A yamshstchik is an inert creature, almost as hard to move as a foundered tarantass.

Night was coming on as we unharnessed the horses and led them back into a clear place in the forest. Here we gave them their hay, of which we had brought a plentiful supply, lit a fire, and made ourselves tea. It was pleasant enough then. What a grand thing is a huge camp fire ! We did not economize wood ; there was no need to do so, it was lying round us on every side. Picturesque enough it looked, that scene. Our three drivers, in their sheepskin coats, or *malitsas*, the six horses munching at their hay, and the light of the fire flashing its way out into the hollows among the pine-trees

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and lighting their trunks to red. You know how some sights, sounds, and especially some scents, have the power of carrying you back far out of the reach of present things. It is so often with myself. In certain moods I have but thoughtlessly to open a drawer, where perhaps a little Moorish bag is hidden which has never lost the native smell derived from its former state, and instantly I am out of the body, as it were, and away once more among the Arabs, among camels, and haiks, and silver-inlaid guns. A breath from a garden where they are burning weeds will take me back into the mountains of California, where the first sun is looking through the pine-tops and the smoke is setting upwards towards the snow. And now I had but to lie back among the blaeberreries to be lost in a reverie such as this. Once more I was by the camp fire with Tiah the Sioux and Baptiste the half-breed, who were with me in the far North-West. They were telling me again about Captain Sherman and the fight at Silver Creek. And the

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snowy owls came sailing into the light of the fire, and out in the forests the coyottes called.

But with this last recollection we were all in a moment upon our feet; for, indeed, from far away among the pine-trees came the long-drawn howl of a timber wolf. Our horses heard it, and plunged suddenly. I, who had never thought of wolves, had not secured at all the horse I led, thinking he would be only too glad to munch and rest. Now, in his alarm, he was on the point of bolting, when I just managed to catch his head, and hung on till he settled down. These horses, familiar as they must be with the howling of wolves, never become indifferent to it. Ours never heard a wolf's howl without starting, sometimes stopping short and snorting, and sometimes trying to bolt. Several times the voices of distant wolves, quite beyond our hearing, made them snort and stare in a most unmistakable way. We had rested, I suppose, for an hour and a half, when it seemed time to make an effort to get the men again upon their feet.

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But they were now as hard to move as a tarantass in a bog. A Russian driver once asleep is a puzzle at any time ; but these particular men had clearly made up their minds that I should not move till morning, and were quite unprepared for renewed efforts. But, in spite of some grumbling, we were soon warming ourselves over the remains of the embers, and then were out on the track again and ready to put to the team. But the unforeseen was there before us. We, out of the wind among the forest trees and by our huge warm fire, had not realized that a hard frost had set in ; but it had, and we arrived to find the track solid as a rock even in the short interval that had passed ; worse than this, the two tarantasses, which we had left bedded as usual in a deep mud-hole, were now absolutely immovable. They were frozen in, as hopelessly as though themselves part of the solid ground, and without spade or pick-axe here were we five miles from any human being, from any hand of help. One thing only could be done. I sent the horses

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and their drivers with Yagor and Hyland back to the fire, and set out alone for the next stantsyia. Dear old Sailor was very anxious to come with me; but the old dog had had a very tiring day, for though we had carried him as much as possible, he had still been obliged to travel through much of the mud and wet; so I left him in Hyland's care. There was no danger in thus leaving the track blocked with our tarantasses, for it was perfectly certain that no other vehicle would come that way. Indeed, during the whole of this early part of the journey we only met a passer-by on two occasions. Once a soldier came along in his big grey coat, going, Yagor said, to see his mother, who kept a stantsyia on the trail, and once we met a *tchinovnik*, or official, who, however, remained at the next stantsyia, as we heard afterwards, unable to get along.

It was a lovely starlight night as I trudged away. The walking was very rough, for there was no snow, and the way was frozen

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into hard lumps. It was not uninteresting to travel this lonely road, the silence only broken by the howl of a wolf or the hooting of a forest owl. I did not hurry, for I liked to pause and listen to the forest sounds ; and though the frost was very keen, no wind blew, so it was not at all distressing. At last I walked into the Ouskaya stantsyia, told my story, and sent two peasants back with iron bars, the best kind of implement that they could produce. They also took two more horses, and a forest cart, called a *telega*, against another probable breakdown. About midnight the whole party returned ; the tarantasses had travelled better, though the way was very rough.

On the following day we left with sleighs and fresh horses. No snow had fallen, and the road was very rugged, and so hard that, though we could only go at a walking pace, we made far better progress than on the day before with wheels.

We crossed without mishap the little river Oussa, just above its junction with

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the Chilma, which was still running ice. In one of the sleighs we had a remarkably smart grey horse. The keeper of the Ouskaya stantsyia had thrown every difficulty in the way of my taking horses at all : he protested, as the others had done, that it was madness to go on ; but, like the others, he protested in vain. He was rightly very proud of this grey horse, and he told me that the winter before this horse had taken an Englishman, Mr. Jackson, the whole way from this stantsyia to Pinega in six days. Mr. Jackson's yamshstchik was with us now, and described graphically to me their flying journey when the sleigh sped over the frozen snow. Mr. Frederick Jackson was then returning from his Siberian journey. There was temptation in this story, I admit. If we could only wait until the winter, we too should have a comfortable time, for nothing is more delightful than to sit in a sleigh in good warm furs, and be whirled along over the frozen snow. But I had gone too far now for retreat ; there was nothing for it

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but to peg on grimly, and pray for snow to fall.

That evening we reached the Muilsaya stantsyia on the Muila River, and found ourselves in a little hamlet, which, through stress of circumstances, we were to learn too well. Though of this on the first night of our arrival I was blissfully unaware.

CHAPTER XI

HARD FACTS

WE were now in the country of the Zirians, a race allied to the Finns. They have a language of their own, which is said to bear resemblance to Finnish ; but although I fancied I heard them talking to each other in a peculiar tongue, they also spoke Russian at least as well as the Russian peasants. Moreover, except that their cheek-bones were possibly a little more pronounced, I could not detect any other distinction. They seemed to have no characteristics of dress. Their women were very active, riding horses astride, and bringing in timber on sleighs without help.

We were brought up short ; for though we were now in a little settlement, there was not a man about the place, and at the stantsyia

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not a single horse. The women told us that the men were away in the forest, but some might be here on the morrow. There was nothing for it but to wait in patience and go out shooting capercaillie. So I made Hyland unpack his gun, and off we went into the forest. These fine birds were fairly numerous, but not very easy to approach, for the males would sit on the very tip-top of the fir-trees and command every movement down below. None the less, between us we got two or three blackcocks and one capercaillie hen, and were much disappointed to find later on that the half-starved dogs of the place had thieved our game from the nail where we had foolishly hung it against the wall of the hut. We were really rather badly off for food. No food of any kind can be obtained at these resting places. Their keepers are only bound to provide a samovar, teapot, and tumblers. When a traveller arrives, red-hot charcoal is put into the samovar, and into the resulting hot water he must put his own tea, which is drunk in tumblers. We had with

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us tea, cakes, dried bread (called *suchar*), hard-boiled eggs, and our reindeer leg. This fare we had now been attacking for four days. The reindeer's hind-leg, you may remember, was part of our original supply from Askinö nine days ago. We had fed on it a good deal since that, and it was getting sensibly smaller and also more tender. We used to fry pieces in the top of a biscuit tin in the stantsyia ovens. Old Sailor was not so badly off as you might suppose, because his long and silky ears invariably won him attention from the women wherever he went.

Several of the people in this small settlement kept a little cow, in every case so thin that, like Mark Twain's horse, it looked as if it had "swallowed a spiral spring."

The day following (October 13th by our reckoning, but October 1st by the old style as used in Russia) promised to bring us better luck. There arrived at this stantsyia a postman out of work. He had been along the track with the ispravnik's notice that from this day there would be no post for a month;

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also during the day some peasants came in from the forest bringing horses, and the yamshstchik of the stantsyia returned to his "official residence." But this man absolutely declined to help me in any way whatever. I showed him my papers, by which, under the seal of the Governor, I was to command horses anywhere. He replied that if the Governor himself were there and wanted horses he should not have them. For this was the month of holiday (or, as he called it, of *srok*), and all contracts were off. He further had this bit of bad news for us : that there were no horses at all between this place and the Barakovska stantsyia, 68 versts away. Now, with all our efforts and our changes of horses, we had only done 62 versts so far ; so the outlook of having to do a greater distance without changing teams was not encouraging. I quite saw that the man's point of view was not an unreasonable one, for he would be compelled to bring back his tired horses all that way : but this I could not admit to him ; so I told him that if

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he would not lend his horses, I should take them. He looked unutterable things, but said nothing. But I was out-manceuvred; for a little later all the harness was gone from the stable, and the yamshstchik himself was away in hiding "in the forest," waiting till the clouds rolled by. I could only reproach myself for my stupidity in not keeping a sharper watch upon him, and felt that I deserved to be outwitted.

But then the postman came out well. He had been considering the matter, he said, with one of the peasants, and they had agreed together that, if I would pay them double *progonia* (tariff), they would find horses and undertake to see us through to the Barakovska stantsyia; and we should make a start that evening. To this I was only too glad to assent.

The evening came, but, alas! the peasant had repented of his words. He too was gone "into the forest," and the postman could not fetch him back. The forest in North Russia is the great appeal from all that is disliked.

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Because of the forest you can hold no one to his bargain, for the forest lies at his very door. A man need but slip away for fifty paces, double a little to right and left, and you might as well be running a wolf.

Our postman was very much annoyed, as became a man of his word. He vowed he would yet find us a yamshstchik, and should not again let him escape. Meantime, in proof of his solicitude, he unearthed from somewhere a wooden bedstead and brought that in, for he said it would be so much better than lying on the floor. There was no mattress: it was a plank bed. Personally I had got so well used to floor and ground sleeping that I was quite content. To please him, however, I tried his bedstead, but it creaked and sank and broke, and I was once more on the floor.

I was just falling asleep, when our friend came in to say that he had found another peasant who was ready to come, and that we should leave very early on the following morning with five horses and three reindeer-

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sleighs which the horses should draw. This was cheerful news.

So I was up at daybreak, only to find the reindeer sleighs could not be had. But eventually we did start with a mixed train, composed as follows : one tarantass, one sleigh, and one timber-cart.

Now I have begun to reflect that, if I am to give the details of each day, my readers may find them perhaps as tiring and as difficult to struggle through as the very obstacles they describe. I will therefore pass lightly over all but instances which stand out most sharply ; for if my friends have been with me to this point, I desire nothing less than to be voted a bore by those who have been so patient.

Our henchman Yagor had been growing more and more insufferable, and this day sealed his doom. I had provided a spare horse, in order that when we came to an exceptionally bad place we might at least be able to hitch on an extra and fairly fresh horse. I had therefore directed that it

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should be tied to the back of one of the vehicles. Sending our train forward, I remained behind for a little while to settle up accounts, and presently overtook the rest of the party about a mile on their way. Imagine my disgust at finding Yagor gaily riding my spare horse through one of the worst bits of deep and holding bog. I very quickly routed him off, and bid him hitch the horse to the tarantass which was in difficulties. But now I discovered that no collar had been brought for this horse. I cross-questioned the postman about this, and the man, pinned in a corner, confessed that Yagor had insisted on his leaving the collar behind, as the horse was "only intended for us to ride through the soft places." The spectacle of Yagor, who had never done any work, swaggering along like Sancho Panza and nursing his villainy on the top of my spare horse, was beyond my patience. On my insisting that, unless he went back instantly and brought the collar from the stantsyia, I should report him to the

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ispravnik, which would mean his ruin, as he well knew, he slunk off, while we lit a fire and awaited his return. He was back with the collar in about two hours, and then I dismissed him for good and all. At first he whined and went into tears, trying to kiss my hand; but finding me obdurate, he changed his tune and turned away back along the boggy trail, vowing many bad things in his beard. I was sure we should get on better without him, for his swagger and his bullying manner towards the yamshstchiki were sources of friction from morning to night.

Soon after Yagor left, the whole cavalcade was brought to a standstill in a curious way. We had been obliged to leave the track, and were winding through the forest, when the leading horse suddenly began snorting, struck out his forelegs, and refused to budge. He was staring wildly at a dark hollow by the base of a bog tree. On going up to this, I found the lair of a bear. It was formed of leaves, moss, and rubbish, and was quite compact and round. From its appearance it had

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evidently been lately inhabited, and indeed we could track the bear away from it by fresh footprints. We could not ourselves smell anything ; but the horses' senses were sharper than ours, and it was only after much difficulty that we got them past.

It snowed steadily all this day, and our sleigh travelled fairly well ; the timber-cart also, though its wheels sank deeply, at any rate kept moving along ; but the tarantass was constantly in a hopeless plight, and broke down several times. We were all therefore profoundly glad to reach Fatievskaya stantsyia. It was the same story as before ; there were no men about the place. The women told us that the men were off in the forest shooting capercaillie and black-game ; that they were going to collect their bag at the next stantsyia—the Valsoovskaya stantsyia—and that now the snow had fallen and the frost come, horses and light sleighs would be coming from the stantsyia beyond to pick up the bag. Our only chance of fresh horses would therefore be to push on at once and

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catch the men ; for should it freeze all night, as seemed probable, they would be off again with the first daylight.

As there seemed every prospect of our provisions failing,—for the hard-boiled eggs, of which I had brought several dozen from Ust Tsilma, were all but finished, the little cakes were dwindling fast, and our reindeer leg (which had been food for Sailor as well as ourselves) was little more than bare bone,—I felt there was need to look to the commissariat. I went round from wooden hut to wooden hut, but could hear of nothing till I came to an open shed where that morning they had cut up one of the thin little cows. Half of the back was still hanging, undisposed of, against the wall. I bargained for this, and secured it. That it looked hopelessly hard and stringy was a detail not worth considering under the circumstances. I bore it away and was grateful.

We had travelled this day about twelve miles, so after a short rest I again pushed on amid much grumbling from the men and de-

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clarations that they could not complete their bargain ; and that if they had had any idea of the real condition of the track, nothing would have induced them to set out. It takes a great deal to hurt a north Russian horse, but the poor beasts were evidently in a very tired way ; and I must confess to a feeling of cruelty when I found the extreme difficulty with which we now urged them forward. But to stop short of this next post was clearly impossible under the circumstances. The snow lay very light on the ground, and a hard frost had turned the road to iron. The old tarantass was jolting over the frozen lumps, and threatening to collapse every moment. But it was far better than the bogs. Foot by foot, therefore, we made our way along, until in the growing darkness we struggled up to the Valsoovskaya stantsyia, but only, alas ! to find it silent and deserted.

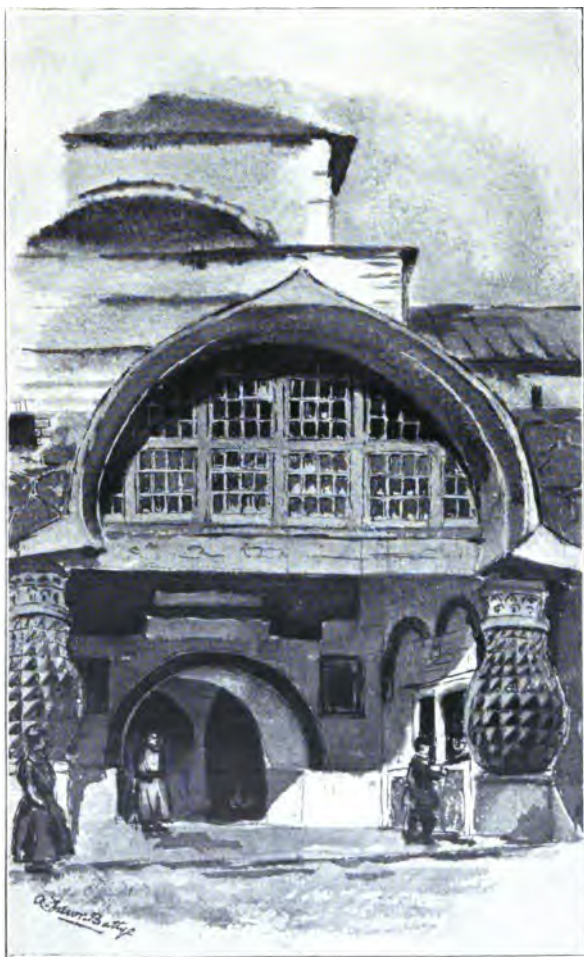
We had now been travelling for seven days, and yet had only made some seventy-five miles of the long journey on which we were embarked.

CHAPTER XII

OLD FRIENDS AGAIN

WHILE the others collected wood, I hacked up with the axe some of the cow's back which I had bought at Fatievskaya, for it was frozen hard, and then explored the hut. It was pitch-dark inside, for night had fallen, yet the place was warmer than the air outside, and very "stuffy" too.

Striking a match, I groped my way about the room, in the hope of finding a samovar and teacups or tumblers. In this I was disappointed. I could, indeed, light upon nothing which could be of the slightest use to us in cookery of any kind. A paraffin lamp hanging from the ceiling was the one article which promised better things. But when I tried to light it, the wick spluttered



GATEWAY OF THE MONASTERY ON SOLOVETSK.

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and spit and declined to kindle. Groping my way about, I stumbled across a dog, which growled and slunk away. Then I inspected the oven. There was not a spark of fire in it, but the ashes felt distinctly warm. This was strange.

Two bundles of skins were lying on the floor near the oven, and as I stooped down to look at one of these, it gave a grunt and rolled over. At this moment my companions arrived with wood. On the sound of their entry both the skin bundles sat up, and to my utter astonishment revealed the features of two Samoyeds. Nothing could have been more unexpected than meeting these old friends again under these curious circumstances. Singularly out of place in a log-built hut these children of the tundra seemed. But the unexpected was very pleasant. A moment before I had been feeling very dull, for everything was melancholy; the horses were worn out, the men were grumbling, and thoroughly tired and out of heart; there did not seem the smallest prospect of moving

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beyond this point, and we had arrived at night, in bitter weather, to find the station dark and deserted by those who should have welcomed us there. But now this was changed. Suddenly to come upon these two little nomads was a real relief. The very first glimpse of their little twinkling eyes and the sound of their first sleepy welcome, "*Sdorova*" (How d'ye do), put one in better spirits. Old Sailor, the spaniel, was wild with delight; indeed, he startled the poor little men by rushing in upon them, scrambling all over them and licking their faces, and testifying generally by boisterous behaviour that every Samoyed was his friend. It is not a little curious that this dog, who, when he first met the Samoyeds upon Kolguev,—shy, I suppose, at their curious smell,—had been extremely cautious in making friends, should have learnt to be so fond of them. He never took to the Russians in the same way, and yet all the Russians were kind to him.

I was the only one of our party who could

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speaking any Samoyed, and though that was little enough, it quickly won upon our two friends. They took the most intense interest in all I told them about their Kolguev kinsmen, and said they wanted very much to go there, but did not know how to cross. "How is it," I asked them, "that you have wandered so far away from the tundra, and what are you doing here?" They told me then that they had a large reindeer encampment about a mile away on the top of a bare hill, and that they were gradually working their way to Archangel to sell skins. But it would take a long time, because the rivers were not properly frozen yet. "And you," they added in most decided tones, "you go next stantsyia; you go no more, no, no, you stop then: yes, yes, stop; river no good: bad river." Well, I thought to myself, if we get to the next stantsyia it will be much, for our horses could take us no farther. A north Russian horse is a remarkable beast. It never enters a yamshstchik's head to put any clothing on his horse, and for that matter we had not

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with us a single thing which could be used in that way,—not so much as an old sack. There were our horses at this moment, after having come in steaming hot, standing outside in the bitter wind and the snow, which was now falling fast, and there they would stand till morning. Often and often have I gone outside in the piercing cold of the dawn and found the poor horses white with rime, and with dry and staring coats standing meekly tail to wind and looking as if they must die. An English horse would go early to his grave, but no chill or inflammation ever seems to attack these hardy beasts. They might start a little stiffly at first, perhaps, but a few minutes of exercise would invariably put them all right.

We very soon had a red-hot oven, and in it I cooked a bit of the cow's back. But it proved to be no tenderer than cat-gut, so we had again to fall back upon the reindeer's hind leg. Though we failed of a samovar our Samoyeds lent us a little tin pot in which we made some tea. Everything had to be

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done by the light of the oven fire, for we had no candles and the lamp entirely declined to burn. One of the Samoyeds expressed great surprise at this, for he said that, though it was empty when he came in, he had filled it up quite full of *water*!

As soon as we had finished supper, I explained to our new friends that they would have to take us on reindeer sleighs to the Barakovskaya stantsyia without delay. Oh, they answered, they were only poor Samoyed workmen; they had no reindeer, but they would go and see what the head Samoyed had to say about it; and these good little men set out straightway into the night. As far as we could judge by the uncertain light, the floor of the hut (there was no sort of furniture) was exceedingly dirty; but we could not afford to be particular, so we were very soon curled up on the floor and fast asleep.

About midnight I was aroused by the return of the Samoyeds. Stumbling up in the pitchy darkness, I carried on one of the

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old, curious conversations, half Russian, half Samoyed, by the light of a succession of matches. Our friends said that the Samoyed who owned the reindeer would not hear of their going on any consideration. The conversation, which was whispered, was much like this :—

“Well, Nabda” (his name), “reindeer going? Reindeer go Barakovskaya?”

“No, no, impossible; Samoyed say impossible; no, no.”

“Why impossible? It is not far.”

“Yes, yes, very far; Samoyed rich, yes, yes; Samoyed not work for Russian man, no no; not for Russian man, no, no.”

I explained with no apparent success that the Russian men were at that moment snoring loudly in a corner of the room, and I wish I could convey an idea of the monkey-like twinkle of little Nabda's eye as he glanced at them, apprehensive lest they should wake and hear.

If this had been my first meeting with a Samoyed, I should have been taken in; but

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I knew well enough the ways of these little men, and saw clearly there was something behind.

"Very well," I said in a loud voice, "then we start with the horses at once for Barakovskaya stantsyia." Up woke the poor Russians, the peasant and the postman, and half asleep, still looking stupidly on, only half understanding. For I was stamping about with a fine show of energy. It seemed cruel to turn these poor fellows out into the cold for nothing. "Lie still," I told them, "I will harness the horses and let you know when they are ready." So I stumbled out into the snow—and *bitter* cold it was—and seizing some harness had already got it on to the back of one of the horses, when Nabda, who was watching from the door, could contain himself no longer, but came tumbling along all in a heap like a Chinese doll.

"Yes, yes, Samoyed say five rouble ; Samoyed very good man. English very good man ; Samoyed go Barakovskaya, reindeer go quick, yes, yes."

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Off came the horse's harness ; Nabda and I ratified the bargain with a sideways shake of the hand held at arm's-length and shaken slowly, as their custom is over a bargain. A bargain confirmed in this way is inviolable. And away he went to get the reindeer, while I returned to sleep in perfect peace of mind, for I have never known a single instance of a bargain being repudiated after the final hand-shaking.

You can sleep pretty soundly, even upon the floor of an empty log hut, and it only seemed five minutes before the Samoyeds were back again with their headman, four sleighs, and eight reindeer. To myself, who had done so much reindeer-driving upon Kolguev, and yet had never been used to driving teams of fewer than five reindeer, two deer to a sleigh seemed curiously few. But then, I had only driven in summer, whereas the ground now was covered with snow and hard frozen, which, of course, made all the difference. Old Sailor, who was again delighted to meet more old friends,

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bounded round the deer and barked with such effect that they all but bolted.

The Samoyeds had not realized that we had so much baggage, and it took a long time to rope it up satisfactorily upon the sleighs. But it was done at last, and we perched on the top in positions of most unstable equilibrium.

For many reasons I shall never forget that drive. The cold was intense, and under the runners of the sleighs the snow whistled like a fife, for it was hard as powdered glass. I let Sailor run at first, but the deer travelled so quickly that very soon I took him up on my sleigh, where the old dog managed to preserve a precarious position among the boxes and bags.

Only two out of the eight reindeer were driven, the others with their sleighs were attached. The Samoyed went first, driving his two deer, while behind his sleigh two deer pulling a baggage sleigh were attached ; to the back of this sleigh Hyland's deer were fastened, and to the back of Hyland's sleigh

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mine, for I made a point of taking the rear-most sleigh because odds and ends of baggage are apt to slip off now and then, and I desired to have all under my own eye. Mine was a big baggage sleigh and very heavily laden, and whenever we went down an incline,—and there were very many steep ones on this journey,—my sleigh took occasion to speed off by its own momentum, and I had no means whatever of checking its course. At first I was afraid that my deer's hind legs would be broken, for the sleigh quite overran them and knocked them cruelly about. But after this had happened once or twice, they met the difficulty in the cleverest way. As the sleigh came down behind them they separated to right and left, and the sleigh rushing on between them charged full into the back of Hyland's sleigh with a concussion which would have broken anything else but a Samoyed's sleigh.

We had left at 2.30 a.m., and now it was just getting light; we stopped, ate some bread, lit cigarettes (some of those that the

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kind Ust Tsilma ispravnik had given me), and stamped about a little to get warm. Then on we went again, and soon entered a very curious place. Some agent—water, no doubt—had cut a deep hollow through a hill. On either side the banks rose high, and the trees seemed almost to meet overhead. But the strangest thing about it was this, that just where it should have been driest it was bog. So strong were the springs which fed it, that here, where the wind had no entry because of the banks and the trees, our reindeer, breaking through a thin crust of ice, squirted up the water with every step they took. Had we been dependent upon horses then, we should indeed have been in a pretty plight.

At last we came to a stream which was swollen so badly that we had to leave the track and trace up the bank to find a crossing. We tried two or three places before we could find a fordable shallow, though here the deer were up to their bellies and nearly carried off their legs. On reach-

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ing the other side we were in a forest of a very dense character, through which we cut our way very slowly with axes. So that it was well on towards mid-day when we reached Barakovskaya stantsyia.

CHAPTER XIII

A FRAGILE BRIDGE

THE Barakovskaya stantsyia was kept by two brothers; the younger a good-natured, willing boy, but the elder, a big, ill-faced, surly fellow, who threw every possible difficulty in our way, helped himself to some of my property when we were out of sight, and gave me about an hour's trouble before he confessed and disgorged.

The little Samoyed driver was as glad as ourselves to get out of the cold into a warm room, and immediately curled himself up on the top of the oven, whence he carried on an animated conversation with the yamshstchik, whilst we were trying to sleep. What with this and the great activity of fleas, with which the place was swarming, we got little rest; and as there seemed no prospect of

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horses, I got up, roused Hyland, and went out to shoot ripa, which were now, of course, in their white winter dress, and, but for their black beaks and the red eye-streak, would have been very hard to see in the snow.

We struck straight into the forest, up to our knees in snow. At every touch the snow showered down from the pine branches in a fine, dry, penetrating dust. We saw the tracks of many hares and foxes, and we followed the big footprint of a wolf round the edge of a frozen forest lake. At the end of some two hours I suddenly asked my companion to show me the way back, and he amused me much by pointing in exactly the opposite direction. So convinced was he that he followed me most reluctantly and sceptically as I led him the other way, and could scarcely believe his eyes when I brought him across our own tracks and so out into the road near the hut. It is always like this with the unpractised. Forest travelling is curious work, and a man will often feel the most profound conviction of the right direc-

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tion, when, in reality, he has been walking in a circle and is quite wrong. Surprised as Hyland was when I pointed out how I had known the way, there was little really in it,—nothing more, indeed, than that I had noticed that the snow, in driving, had clung more thickly to one side of the trees than to the other.

We often hear of the “instinct of direction,” as we may call it, possessed so marvelously by savage races. People profess to explain it in one of two ways. It is either said that the Indian actually does take note of the sun, the wind, the lie of the land, or the course of the streams,—which, as a fact, it is often, in the dense forest, impossible for him to do,—or else it is set down simply as “instinct,” and this, though it is nearer the mark, is, in a sense, to beg the question. Instinct, however it may be in the case of animals, is here, no doubt, hereditary experience. The sun, the wind, the streams, are influences; but only that. The Indian does not consciously observe them. Just as you,

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using an experience gained in daylight, can follow without hands in the dark a winding staircase between the bannisters and the wall, so with the Indian in his forest. His "observation" is entirely subjective, an unconscious impression, the sum of small influences to which, by heredity, his senses are alive, as the retina to light pictures. In the same way I had not *consciously* remarked the lie of the snow on the trees, yet the *fact* kept me from going astray. But this is a digression.

We came on the 17th of October to a tributary of the Mezen quite small, and crossed by a bridge, which now, however, was broken. Its nearer end was sunk, and great masses of ice were charging up against the frame and swirling through the breach. I had four sleighs and five horses, and the yamshstchiki—there were two and a boy—at once decided we could not cross. But I set them an example and made them work, though much against their will. Judging the distance very carefully, it seemed to me that some of the tallest trees, if thrown, would

A FRAGILE BRIDGE

span the space from bank to bridge. We set to work with the axe, and had soon thrown enough for our purpose. First it was necessary to lay a tree or two across as a fend against the ice. We had two failures. The strong stream catching the points of the trees snatched them round in a moment and carried them off down stream. At last we got one fixed, branches and all. The ice was piling up against it, and it clearly would not keep its position long; already it "sagged" ominously, and we were obliged to throw another by its side before we could venture upon the next move. We had now thrown the only trees which stood by the edge of the stream at this particular point. Meantime, however, under my direction, two of the hands had felled a couple of long poplars back in the forest, and now brought these up with the horses. It was a question how we were to get them fixed across. The spruces we had thrown so that they fell a little up-stream and caught in the broken bridge as they drifted down. But we were

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much too short-handed to raise these poplars, and had we not been the risk that they would dislodge the spruces was too great. We therefore fastened a long rope to the thin end of the first poplar, and secured the butt end to a stump with another. Now came the difficulty of laying the poplars across. We had with us the son of the head yamshstchik, a lad of about fourteen. This plucky boy was quite ready to venture across the water on the spruces. We believed that they would carry him, though the weight of a grown man would certainly have sunk the head of the floating tree. It was nervous work at the best, with a ducking threatened ; but there was plenty of hand-hold on the branches, though I may frankly admit that I should have been sorry to have personally tested it. To travel in soaking clothes in such a temperature was not a pleasant look-out. But the boy succeeded pluckily and well, landing safely on the broken bridge, to which he fastened his rope. So far, so good ; but the poplars had yet to be fastened

A FRAGILE BRIDGE

in position. Below the bridge was a wide shallow, and as our rampart had stopped the ice for a time from coming down, the water was now free. Here I with one man crossed, riding two of the horses, while the others remained to start the sleighs. The water was higher than our horses' bellies, the stream was strong and the bottom stony, and they floundered about a good deal. But we got over with nothing worse than wet legs, hurried up to the bridge, and hauling the ends of the poplars up-stream, fastened them parallel to each other, and about eighteen inches apart, so that they should be in between the runners, and the sleighs could run on them, prevented by the runners from sliding to right or left. I still had with me the long coil of green hide cut from the blue seal, which the Samoyeds use for their sleigh traces—the same with which we had hauled the horses up the river bank, as related earlier in this account. This now came in again most usefully. Hyland and the second yamshstchik brought the sleighs to the edge

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of the water and got their noses straight on the fallen trees. The boy crossed and brought over what rope and thongs still remained, but these were now so short that we had to resort to the expedient of fastening birch poles to them, which we cut near by. Two poles' length and the thongs added to the length of the sleigh just spanned the space. Now all was ready. The horses stood on the bridge, as close to its fallen end as we dared bring them; they were joined to the sleigh by a nondescript attachment of rope, string, thongs, and poles; the sleigh rested its nose on the poplar trunks, and on either side stood Hyland and a yamshstchik ready to steady it off. The idea was that the yamshstchik should keep behind the sleigh and steady it in crossing. This first sleigh contained my two tin air-tight "uniform cases," our food, boots, tent, and hardware generally. Things that "wouldn't hurt," as we gaily put it, for we never stopped to think how we were to get them up from the bottom of the river in the event of a spill.

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The moment had arrived ; the horses plunged on the broken bridge and the sleigh started on its way, but half-way over had to be left to itself. For the yamshstchik who guided it made the poplars spring so seriously, as he walked with a foot on either, that the sleigh was in great danger of pitching over. So the man turned, and running back by this uncertain bridge regained the bank in safety. The sleigh came swaying along in an ominous manner, but no accident occurred. It reached the bridge, hung for a moment, and then with a plunge was on the bridge and safe. With the second sleigh we were not so lucky ; for the traces snapped with the jerk of the sleigh as it reached the bridge, and for a few minutes it hung perilously half over in the water. But I flung myself on it, the man who was with me added his weight, it righted itself, we hauled it up, and all was well.

I was rather proud of this engineering feat ; but there was really not much margin. We had harnessed up again, and were on the

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point of starting, when a swishing sound made us all look round. The ice and the currents had won their way, and our wonderful bridge was whirling down the river like a thing of straw.

The following day we were temporarily stopped by another river, where the ice was just strong enough to carry us, but not the horses or sleighs. We got over this difficulty, after many hours' labour, by breaking a track across the ice and filling it with spruce branches and poles. By the following morning it had all set hard, and we were able to cross.

The track itself, frozen and covered with snow, now offered good travelling. We found at the Forminskaya stantsyia a merry, pleasant yamshstchik. The Nijnisoolskaya stantsyia was clean and cheerful—a welcome change. At Kassumskaya stantsyia we ate potatoes for the second time since June, so on the whole we were in good spirits.

I shall never forget the beauty of a certain scene on the banks of the river Neza, which

A FRAGILE BRIDGE

we reached on the night of the 20th October. It was absolutely still; a white and splendid moon hung over the forest, and the fir trees glittered in the rime. From the forest's edge a smooth and sparkling snow-slope, unruffled by a single track, led to the river's brink. One little round head of hay stuck out above the snow, and at this the horses nibbled when we stopped. The river was wide and laden with floes of ice, and it was very doubtful whether we should get across. Over the other side we could make out a long dark line and the moonlight shining on roofs of houses.

We all yelled at the top of our voices, but for a long time no answer came. At last there was a responsive halloa, and then a shouted altercation sustained for many minutes. To follow the subtleties of this duet was far beyond me; but one word stood prominently out above all the rest, and I heard it now for the thousandth time since we left Ust Tsilma, our old friend "*Nyelziah*"—"Impossible!" So they absolutely declined to help

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us ; was it likely indeed that they would venture in the night upon the risks of a crossing through the ice? Our yamshstchik—he was a capital fellow—changed his tune, and the word “ Governor ” cropped up more often than before. Our friend had authority to use the full weight of the papers I carried from the Governor, but I am not at all certain that on this occasion he did not go beyond his cue. I am really afraid that word went across the water to the effect that it was no less a person than the Governor himself who was here. At any rate there followed a silence, and after a time a little black speck of a boat began to show itself coming through the ice. Long and risky as the passage was, it came at last, manned by the three stout peasants who had pushed it through the ice. Leaving the sleighs and drivers to find their way home, we stowed the baggage and embarked. Very carefully we had to go, with the gunwale now down to the water’s edge. We could not pull, the ice was packed too close, but poled our way

A FRAGILE BRIDGE

across, fending off the great blocks that threatened to smash us, and working our way among them to the opposite shore.

Our arrival was memorable for one event, for that night saw the end of our reindeer leg. We ate the last piece, cooked in our frying-pan (the biscuit tin's lid), and before he curled up for sleep old Sailor spent a good half-hour in picking the bone clean.

CHAPTER XIV

A TRAGEDY

THE character of the country had changed. Spruce trees and swamp had given place to larches, aspen, and broken ground. Bright flocks of Russian bullfinches (larger birds than our own) were often seen, and green and red crossbills piped as they flew from tree to tree, or hung back-downwards, prizing open the larch cones with their strong hooked beaks. The Siberian jay, too, became a more constant companion, and more confidently audacious than ever.

We crossed another small arm of the river Mezen, and found ourselves at Noskima. Something now seemed to say that we were drawing nearer to a settled country. The villagers had lost to a great extent the half-

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wild, almost irresponsible look of the isolated northern peasantry, and had more of the air and manners of the villagers at home. The village rang with the laughter of children, playing snow games and drawing small sleighs about. These little sleighs are very useful; the children bring water on them, and use them for other family purposes.

We heard English spoken here for the first time, though only by one person. He was an old, old man, with long white hair and a long white beard, whom I should have liked better if he had not always been attempting to kiss my hand. He called me "Capitain" always, and that was part of his English. He said also, "broken ship," and the numerals up to nine. This was all the English he knew, but he made the most of it, and repeated the formula strung together: "Capitain, broken ship, one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine," over and over again whenever he came across me, like a penance for his soul.

I suppose, poor old fellow, he was really

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not quite strong in his mind, though as a linguist he was the show man of the village while we were there. I imagined that he had once been concerned with some shipwrecked English crew, but failed to find out anything certain of his history.

We had arrived at Shenagorskaya stantsyia soon after midnight on Monday, October the 22nd, after an exciting passage of the big river Mezen, and put up here for a few hours' sleep. Shenagorsk is quite a large village, and our horses, instead of standing out in the cold, found better quarters in a log-built stable.

Here, too, for the first time, we had comfortable lodging. Hyland and I had a room apiece upstairs, and there was a bed in each room. But for some time I did not sleep. I tried the bed, but I had become so unused to that luxury that it felt positively uncomfortable. There had evidently been a fête in the neighbourhood, for sleigh after sleigh kept coming in with its cargo of shouting, singing, vodka-happy villagers. Just under my window, too, some men were moving

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manure from a yard, and made much noise about it. I can only conjecture that they had chosen midnight for this operation because they were working with borrowed teams. The long and short of it was that, as I could not sleep in bed, I tumbled out, spread the clothes upon the floor, and seeking that familiar refuge, slept.

I had not long been sleeping, as it seemed, when I was awakened by the noise of a galloping horse; but I paid little attention to it, and fell asleep again.

When I next woke there was in the sky a suggestion of the dawn. I heard voices below, and looking out saw lanterns flashing, and a group of men in excited conversation. Evidently something was wrong. I was soon out in the street among them.

“What is it?”

“Wolves.”

It was almost incredible, but it was true. In the stable were two horses sweating with fear, an empty stall, and a broken halter. Here in the middle of the village, in the

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short interval between the last light out and the daybreak, in spite of the unusual stir of returning revellers in the early morning hours, wolves had come, had deliberately pulled open the badly-fastened stable door, and had driven a horse away. I soon had two horses in a sleigh, and with one man started in pursuit, for it struck me that where they pulled down their quarry I might possibly have a shot before they got away, or in any event I wanted to see the end.

It was a piercingly cold morning, with a pale green streak just stealing across the sky, as we went at a gallop up the street. The wolves had the start of us by at least two hours and a half ; but we knew we must come upon the dead horse sooner or later, if the chase had not struck into the forest where the sleighs could not find a way.

For some little distance pursuers and pursued had kept to a farm track, where there had been little traffic since the snow ; into this the hoofs of the terrified horse had struck so deeply that we could follow at a

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good round pace. And on either side were the wolves' tracks wide to the side of the cart-road—two on one side, and one on the other—the tracks of three. It was clear from this that they had never been far behind; they had evidently kept a pace or two off the horse's quarters on either side. It was a grim game, was it not? We could see it all there in the snow as plainly as words could tell: the maddened creature galloping blindly, wildly, hopelessly on, always at his flank the hunting howl and the hungry eyes, always—not for a moment slackening—the loping, tireless, pitiless stride. Yet I think he was trying to make his point, as we say in hunting language. I suppose, poor beast, his instinct bade him keep near man. He was thinking, I doubt not, of some stable or some refuge further on, for all this time he was heading for a hamlet whose roof we could just discern against the sky. My companion thought the same. "He has got there," he said, "and the people are about now, so the wolves have run away." But it was not so.

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Suddenly the tracks swerved to the left, then off the road they went, and away out into the open ground. The wolves had turned the hunted horse; they had bitten him: there was a little blood upon the snow. We followed on. We were heading now for a belt of forest which formed the horizon in front. My companion would have stopped. "It is useless; he is dead by now," he protested. But I urged the horses on. They were going easily enough over the hard snow, the shaft horse trotting quickly under his bells, the near and the off horses at a slow gallop alongside. We strained our eyes to make out some moving creature on the snowy expanse that lay before us, but could see nothing at all. And yet it seemed absolutely impossible that any horse could live so long before hungry hunters such as these. Just when I had reluctantly determined to give it up and turn back, the question was unexpectedly settled. We came to the bank of a frozen stream, and there, lying on the ice half-way across,



Edward B. Pratt

PURSUERS AND PURSUED.

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was the horse, pulled down, poor beast, on the slippery ice. Short as the interval had been, the wolves had eaten and gone. The quantity they had eaten was incredible ; and among other parts they had eaten the sides of the face. One fact impressed me much : they had fairly pulled several of the ribs away from their attachments. To any one who knows the strength of the ligaments which unite the head of the rib to the vertebræ this evidence of the power of a wolf's jaw must appear astonishing.

We had now come some eleven versts. The peasant who owned the animal was very proud of him, saying he always fed him very well, for he was worth it. But, for all that, I was astonished that it should be capable of sustaining for such a long distance so desperate a race. I think, had the wolves been so minded, they must have run into him long before. . But they seemed to have nursed him along at their pleasure ; never running behind, they had kept their places to right and left, as though they could

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be patient since they had the game in hand, until at last the unhappy animal, failing at the ice-crossing, had brought upon itself its doom.

As we reached the stantsyia on our return, the snow began to fall. It came down so heavily, and with so strong a wind, that we thought it wise to wait. But all that day it fell. It piled against the buildings till it reached the window sills, and when the door was opened we beheld a wall of snow. It filled the fir trees with a fine white powder, and fell from them in a dust of atomic ice. That night there was a blizzard, and it was well we had not ventured out. It was not cold inside; I found it far too hot. The oven was kept burning, and the yamshstchiks slept on the top. I used to wonder how any human beings could exist under such conditions. But it is the common practice with all the northern peasantry. The first act of your yamshstchik on entering a house, if he is devout, is to cross himself many times before the ikon, and the next to climb

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up to the oven top, from which simmering pulpit he holds forth on the events of the day.

In these villages the magpie remains through all the winter, and is extraordinarily tame, hopping into the houses with perfect unconcern. The grey or hoodie crows, on the contrary, though they haunt the villages in large flocks until about October, then leave and travel westward. We also saw many jackdaws. All these birds differ slightly from the form familiar in our own country. The magpie has a broad white band over its shoulder; the grey feathering of the crow tends to white; and the jackdaw is very spry and attractive, with a clean, well-marked white collar.

CHAPTER XV

TO THE WHITE SEA

WE were not yet at our journey's end, but the worst was over. Bogs and morasses were left behind. A fair road lay in front of us, and though in places it was very deep in snow, so that we had much difficulty in getting the horses through, this was child's play to what we had before endured. The horses, too, were wonderfully patient, and, when they had floundered into a drift which nearly hid them from view, would quietly wait until we had dug them out. There was still one obstacle ahead, of which every yamshstchik gloomily prophesied at each stantsyia we reached. This was the big river Vashka. They knew nothing down here of the rivers we had already crossed. The Pechora, the Tsilma,

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and all the wild regions through which we had come, were for them but figures of speech. Just as the trade and traffic of the places further east had set towards Ust Tsilma and the Pechora towns, so now all had reference to Pinega, Kholmogorr, and Archangel. The Vashka River was their bogey ; we should never pass that, they said. "Well, well," I told them, "we should see ; meantime we would push along."

The stages, instead of being marked as before by the solitary wooden Government hut, now ended frequently in little villages, in which life was more homely and settled. Our English sparrow was there, a little puffed out by the cold, but chirping and wrangling with all the self-assurance of his kind at home. And now from day to day we saw the hawk-owl (*Surnia funerea*), a bird whose range is confined to the higher forests of the circumpolar area. It differs, as the popular name implies, in certain particulars from the owls more familiar to us in Britain ; the character of the face, for

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example, is different. The facial disc is very incomplete, and the bill, though it curves from the base, is relatively longer and more compressed than, say, in our tawny owl, while the nostrils are round instead of oval. In short, the whole of the head is rather hawk-like in character. The bird is also diurnal in its habits. I often had a good look at one of these birds as we stopped in the forest, perched on the highest twig of a larch or spruce tree, from which it would glide down, sometimes quite close to the sleigh, and take up some small mammal in its talons, quite regardless of our presence. I was not at all surprised to find the bird so friendly, for I had been familiar with it long ago in the North-West Territory, and recollected well how indifferent it was there, even to the sound of my gun.

The weather was very beautiful, the cold was extreme, but the wind had dropped absolutely. Through the still air a small snow fell, or rather floated down. Softly it came in those marvellous crystals, characteristic of

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great cold and great dryness (for the one is the complement of the other). We do not see these crystals in this country (I, at least, have never seen them), because the cold is never so intense as to produce dryness. In the snow, as it falls in England, there is always a certain amount of moisture, which aggregates together the frozen water vesicles and forms snow-flakes. And although the flakes are, of course, in reality composed of crystals, these can only be separated by the microscope from the general mass. The forms of these crystals are so very beautiful that they well repay examination.

Crossing the Vashka River, we got caught in the ice, and had a stubborn fight of exactly two hours with oars and poles before we managed to land. Even then we were not much better off, for we had been obliged to leave the horses behind, and we were carried down with the current three versts below our point. We had commenced to cross opposite the little town of Trufanavar Gorah; but now, as I say, were three good

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versts below it. We therefore set to work to drag one of the sleighs over the snow to the town. It was tiring work, but we were reinforced by help when half-way, for some peasants came along and lent a hand. The river here forms a large horse-shoe, and later on, the same day, we crossed it again, but this time on the ice, which was packed above a bend. The ice was so thick that there was little danger, with ordinary care. The smaller pieces were likely to tip over, but by keeping to the ridges formed by the grinding of the big floes, we crossed all right. As it was too rough for sleighs, we packed the horses and led them across.

At length we came to "Bolchinichigory," and here for the first time we met the telegraph, and were really in touch with the world.

We then had a series of wild, exhilarating drives, for the yamshstchiks took us over the frozen roads at a mad gallop without a bit on the horses' mouths.

We were now approaching the town of Pinega. We still had two crossings of the

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Pinega River before us, and at the Bereostaya stantsyia on October 25th we fell in with the postman, who was waiting till the river should be safe enough to cross. He was much surprised to hear that we had already twice crossed that river, and said that he would go over with us the next day, but that at night in the darkness he did not dare. After our experiences it seemed to us but a small matter to cross anything in the dark, let alone the Pinega River. However, our new friend was a pleasant companion, for he was by a long way the most intelligent man we had met since leaving Ust Tsilma, and so we agreed to wait till the morrow. This postman was a very splendid person, who carried pistols and a sword. He told us stirring stories of his encounters with wolves, and how he had bowled them over from the back of his sleigh. But I fancied he was imaginative, and he certainly had a way of clutching nervously at his pistols at any sound on the road, which did not promise much self-reliance in a difficulty.

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We crossed the Pinega on the day following, and afterwards crossed it once again, and were gazed upon at each place we came to as madmen, or as heroes, I was never sure which.

Eventually we avoided the town of Pinega, and made for Kholmogorr. And so we reached the banks of the great river Dvina, near the White Sea, and here we were brought up short. The river was frozen over. The ice, too thick in the middle for breaking with the boats, was yet too weak in places for a passage with horses or with sleighs. Our postman asserted that he could go no further at least for a couple of days. While I was worrying over the delay I came upon a peasant, who assured me that, if we would pack the horses and give up the sleighs, he could guide us through the forest until we came out on the great road that runs from Archangel to St. Petersburg. By these means we should avoid the river altogether. To this I assented. It was an exasperating journey, for the drifts were deep, and the

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trees were sometimes so close together that they swept the packs off the horses' sides. But the worst came at night, after we had picked up two sleighs at a little hamlet known as Troïnas, and had entered a trail which was to take us out into the main road. It snowed, it blew, and was black as ink. One timber-sleigh had passed that way since the snow, and its track was all we had to guide us. However, I had faith in our drivers, so we sat tight in our sleighs, one of which was fastened behind the other, while the horses, their noses down to the snow, crept along at a snail's pace. Twice my sleigh turned over on its side and rolled me out, and once an amusing thing happened. I must preface this by saying that Hyland, always a great sleeper, had become in the cold abnormally somnolent even for him. We were crossing a small stream by a bridge whose sides were quite unprotected, when I heard the driver give a shout and call for help; the sleighs stopped, and I could just see in the darkness ahead that something had happened. In a

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moment I was out, and had scrambled forward to learn what was the matter. The horse (we now had but one in each sleigh) had walked too near the edge of the bridge, and one runner of the sleigh was over on the ice, while the other remained on the bridge itself. The sleigh of the northern Russian road, as I have before explained, is simply a large cradle woven of willow, and set on runners. I found several packages which had rolled out of the sleigh on to the ice, and old Sailor the spaniel had met with a similar fate, for he came up in the darkness and licked my hand. I put the things back into the sleigh, and then the yamshstchik went to the horse's head and urged him on, while I threw all my strength into raising the sleigh, and after much difficulty it was back in its place. It had seemed to me very heavy, but I had entirely forgotten that Hyland was asleep inside. A ponderous roll, as the sleigh righted itself, reminded me of the fact. But the next day, when I rallied him on the subject, I was amused to find that he had



GALLERY OF THE FORTIFICATIONS OF MONASTERY ON SOLOVETSK.
The openings in the wall lead to fortified chambers.

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no recollection of the occurrence beyond a dim idea "that once the sleigh had stopped."

We lost the track altogether after this, and though we found it again, much of that miserable night was spent by myself in groping along the front of the sleigh, feeling in the darkness, with half-frozen fingers, for the tracks of the timber-sleigh, which, though nearly effaced by the fast-driving snow, were all that marked the way.

But daylight came at last, and with the first streak of dawn we hit the St. Petersburg road, and travelling along till we reached Ouima, slept a little, baited the horses, and were in Archangel by three o'clock of that afternoon.

CHAPTER XVI

ARCHANGEL

A COUNTRY sleigh more or less makes a little stir as it comes in over the snow into the town; the sight of the fur-hooded mujik, half buried in the hay that almost fills the cradle of his sleigh, is a familiar one of every day. We were ordinary enough and dirty enough in appearance by this time to pass in our furoods for travelling traders from the outside forest, so no one looked at us twice as we came into the town through the gateway of Peter the Great.

There are no gates now, nor any wall; just the remains of an old bastion and a dry ditch. Between this and the town itself lies now a wide stretch of grass and wilderness. For Archangel has shrunk, and has



ARCHANGEL—THE CATHEDRAL AND QUAY.

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now only about seventeen or eighteen thousand people, from holding over three times the number. The town itself is full of creeks among the houses, where the wooden tenements have gone to ruin, and only a chance shrub projects from the rank grasses to mark the spot where once a garden lay. I had last seen the place in the previous year, when heavy rains were falling and the deep holes between the cobbles were filled with watery mud that coated drivers and horses and splashed the rash traveller from face to boots. Now, in its deep mantle of fresh snow, it looked cleaner, but very dreary.

On each wooden house, as you approach from the country, is printed a sign telling of the owner's occupation and of the article—axe, ladder or what not—which by compulsion he must provide in a case of fire. This is a very important duty in a wooden town such as Archangel. On one a broom and spade points to a road-cleaner; on another is a fireman's ladder; on another a loaf of bread; on a fourth a pair of long boots, and

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so on. On the gables of every third house or so hangs a bunch of red mountain-ash berries. From this plant—which the Russians call by its scientific name *rubinia*—they make a favourite liqueur, and this is why (as I suppose) rowan berries are the sign of the dealer in spirits.

So we went winding through Archangel till we came to the Vice-Consul's gate. Here I learnt my first bit of English news in rather a funny way. My friend Mr. Cooke, the Vice-Consul, was walking up and down the wooden side-walk by his drive, in conversation with a Russian gentleman. At first he did not recognise in the bearded, skin-clad individual before him a trim English friend of the year before ; but I quickly discovered myself to him, and was introduced to his Russian friend, who spoke English very well.

"Ah ! you are English, you are from England," volubly rattled this gentleman, going off at score ; "ah, then you can tell me—and who is this your *Lady Chant* ?"

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A lady of this name, if not of this title, had just then been engaged in a difference with a London Variety Theatre, and the report of the case had been copied into the *St. Petersburg Gazette* from the French papers. But Kolguev knew of none of these things, so I was not able to help.

Mr. Cooke, in his kind way, insisted that I should stay with him ; and to this I could not but consent. For Hyland I obtained very comfortable quarters at the only hotel Archangel boasts.

Although boats can come up and lie alongside of the market-place of Archangel proper, the greater part of the shipping lies in the river Dvina off the island of Solombola. This island is connected with Archangel by a wooden bridge some half a mile in length. The bridge is so constructed that it can be taken to pieces and removed for the winter ; otherwise, on the breaking up of the ice in the spring, it would be swept away, a wreck. A tentative traffic was already beginning across the river ice ; but as yet

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it was only considered safe in one direction, and that not the straightest, to the other side. My friend Mr. Wilton (the only other Englishman in Archangel), who had charge of a saw-mill on an island at some distance from the shore, had asked me to dine with him, saying that the ice was safe enough if I kept to a certain track, which any guide could point out to me, or I could follow for myself, as it was marked by heaps of snow. But that evening it began to snow again, and the night was exceedingly dark. I took a droski down to the water's edge, but the man would come no farther, as the ice would not bear a horse and sleigh. There was not a soul about, so I was obliged to make the crossing by myself. I could see the lights of Wilton's island twinkling far away, as I committed myself, not without some misgivings, to the chances of this passage. The ice was usually firm enough, but sometimes it seemed to bend, and it creaked in an ominous way, and when I was half-way across I began to wish I had not

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started. It was so dark that I could not see the heaps of snow, only every now and then I stumbled against one. Very slowly I crept along, expecting every moment to be dropped into a water hole and delivered to the sturgeon of the Dvina. Meantime, Wilton was uncorking his liquors in his warm dining-room, blissfully unconscious of his expected guest's position. Eventually, when I was about two-thirds over, I saw a light moving on the shore of the island, and holloaed out to ask if I was right. "No," came back a voice in Russian, "you are off the track altogether; mind, there's water there! Now come straight to this light!" Doing as I was bid, I arrived safely. But my cautious progress had turned a ten minutes' crossing into one of nearly half an hour.

Its prison apart, Archangel has little of interest to show in the way of institutions. In this prison are collected those poor creatures whom fate and their own misdeeds will shortly consign to Siberia. But how-

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ever devoid a city may be of public buildings and points of larger interest, a curious traveller will always extract something worth noticing from the lives and customs of its inhabitants.

I must not forget the Fire Tower. In a wooden town such as this, a fire, if not checked at once, would spread with rapidity over a wide area, and might easily in a short time reduce the whole city to ashes. At a central point, therefore, stands the Fire Tower. Here, at a height perhaps of 100 feet, is stationed, night and day, a watchman, who walks round and round an outside gallery looking out for the first sign of conflagration. Ready to his hand are the electric buttons which call out the engines in case of need. I saw one fire, and can only say that the smartness of the Fire Brigade was not inferior to that of the brigade of one of our provincial towns.

There is no bustle in Archangel—its trade is not large enough now for that. It was so once. Napoleon closed all the ports but

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this, and Archangel then did a roaring business. All along the quay at Solombola are strong pyramidal erections whose sides are scored by the hawsers which the merchantmen passed around them then. But the memory of this is lost to the quay-men now, and is supplanted by the belief that these "bits" were meant as cover for sharpshooters!

Archangel is naturally not very much abreast of modern methods. A walk at night in the Solombola quarter is not lightly to be undertaken, for the darkness is unchallenged by lamps, and the wooden side-walks are very treacherous. These walks are often raised several feet above a ditch, are greasy, and when it rains, slippery in the extreme. The planking runs lengthways, and is supported on trestles. But at frequent intervals the trestles have rotted and fallen, and the planking either behaves like a spring-board or threatens to break your leg through its gaping holes. Each householder is responsible for the repair of the piece immediately

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in front of his holding. But many houses in that quarter are tenantless, and here the side-walk goes to pieces.

The night watchman still goes his rounds in Archangel. He is called a *karaoulshik*, and carries a clapper which sounds along the streets throughout the night. He has metal discs in his pocket, and has to deliver one of these at the end of each half-hour to the inspector at the corner of his beat. But very often the watchman cannot walk because of vodka; then his wife has to go in his place. So these old men and women go about the streets to "keep off the robbers." I don't suppose there is much robbing in Archangel. There are regular police, but they too are apt to be claimed by vodka; and thus we found one individual inside a smart uniform and girt with a sword overcome in the Vice-Consul's garden beneath a mountain-ash. When we tried to rouse him up, he laid it quite resignedly at the door of "vodka," the only word he could then command.

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The attitude of the north Russian peasantry in respect of the national spirit, known as vodka, always interested me very much. I never could find that they blamed themselves, but always the vodka. And even so they reckoned with it less as a traditional enemy than as a law, and quite above their questioning. I do not remember a case where a man tried to disguise the fact of his intemperance, as is the way with hard drinkers elsewhere. Quite the contrary ; vodka was always justification sufficient for any lapse. Asked why he had failed to keep an engagement, your yamshstchik would plead "vodka" with decisive helplessness, as a fact from which there was no appeal. It was the intervention of a higher power ; the initiative was with the vodka and not with the man. Of course, I am only speaking of a point of view, and speaking to a sense of responsibility. I do not for a moment say that there is more absolute drunkenness in northern Russia than there was in England, say, twenty years ago. I

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do not believe there is. I think the Russians are less fortunate in the liquor they take, and I think that the public sense against it is less strongly marked than here.

The market-place in Archangel is full of local life and picturesque interest. Here are sturgeon and sterlet from the Dvina, and here on certain days in the week the salmon lie piled up in heaps, taken in the nets from the river Kem. Nearly all the marketing is done out of doors; the wares are either shown on movable stalls sometimes covered with canvas, or are contained in the large kennel-shaped trunks which every peasant possesses, or are simply displayed on the cobble-stones. Rough pottery, birch wood boxes, japanned and gilded ikoni, medals and sacred pictures, furs, old iron, long felt boots, and all that the country folks can want can here be found. In winter the Samoyeds come in from the tundra, travelling hundreds of miles, and any day their teams of reindeer may be seen about the streets.



A WINTER MARKET PLACE.

ARCHANGEL

Fallen as Archangel is from its once thriving conditions, the day is not far distant when it will take a new lease of life. The great Trans-Siberian Railway is all but finished, and Archangel, moreover, will soon be connected with Vologda by a railway of its own. His late Imperial Majesty, as is well known, took the greatest interest in the welfare and development of the northern parts of his dominions, and one of his latest acts was to see all settled for the construction of this line.

Meantime, in this city of seventeen thousand inhabitants there is no newspaper (beyond a weekly sheet of merchants' prices), the watchman goes round the dark streets with his clapper, and the Jew trades there unharmed.

CHAPTER XVII

TO VOLOGDA

THE railway is coming; meantime travellers must go by sleigh from Archangel to Vologda, the nearest point which the railroad reaches. The distance is 774 versts, and a verst, as I have said before, is about three-quarters of a mile.

Hyland was now feeling happy. He had received letters in Archangel from his sweetheart, and was no longer anxious about the welfare of his business; for, thanks to my persistence in pushing along, he would be back in England in time to make all arrangements for his Christmas trade. I had not intended to spend more than a day or two in Archangel; but what with patching clothes, answering budgets of letters,

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and obtaining the necessary funds for the future, the days lengthened into a week. Cheques could be cashed in Archangel, and it was with feelings of great gratitude that I sent back to the good ispravnik of Ust Tsilma the money he had lent me in so generous a way.

On November 5th I left my kind friends with many regrets. The snow was now hard, and the sleighs travelled easily and well. Even the Dvina was well frozen by now, and the natives had found a crossing, very winding and circuitous, but strong enough to bear a sleigh drawn by only one horse. So we took the team to pieces, and following a guide who carried a lantern, for it was night, crossed in long single file. The Dvina at this point (not far from Kholmogorr) is only a mile and a half wide, but our crossing took us over three miles and a half of river ice.

One day, as we were nearing a village, one of the horses was taken with a slight attack of staggers, and again I was struck with the

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absolute want of the most elementary veterinary knowledge the peasants possess. I gave the yamshstchik my knife, and told him how to do the blood-letting from the horse's palate—a rough-and-ready but most efficacious remedy, and well known to any carter in England. But the man could not be persuaded to do it or let me do it. "No," he said; "in the village there was a very clever man who would be able to cure the horse, if I would only wait till he came." This interested me much. I was anxious to see what remedies would be employed. I sent off for this celebrated doctor, who in due course arrived in the person of Ivan Bulchikoff, as cunning a blackguard, to all appearance, as lived between the four seas. His system was peculiar. Standing near the horse, he asked to be blindfolded, one of the mujiks removing his woollen girdle for that purpose. Then, groping with his hands, he said, "Give me his ear, and I will see about it." Having taken the horse by the ear, he muttered a lot of apparent

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nonsense to it, of which I could only gather the words, often repeated, "God be with you." The faith of these poor people was at any rate supported by results, for soon the horse was so evidently better that I made the man stand clear, when, with a very little urging, it moved on, and presently became all right.

Can anything be more delightful than the motion of a sleigh with the track in perfect order! All the miseries of "Rasputnya" were now past; we glided along at a rapid pace; the middle horse (we had a troika now) at a rapid trot, the right and left galloping alongside. We at one time covered in this way twenty-three versts (about eighteen miles) in one and a half hours, which my readers will admit is "good going."

Early in the morning of November 10, we drove into Vologda. It is an uninteresting-looking wooden town of some 24,000 inhabitants. I was told there was nothing to see, and was glad to believe it; for it was dark and freezing hard when we arrived and

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learnt that a train would leave at eleven o'clock on the same morning. We therefore went to sleep at the stantsyia for a few hours. It was curious to see a railway once more; curious to have done with sleigh and with reindeer, and all the wild life of the far north; but there was no doubt about it, for soon after ten all the baggage was piled in a van, and a big Russian locomotive was puffing off its extra steam.

It was a comfortable "corridor" train, but crept along with exasperating slowness. At ten o'clock that night we arrived at Yaroslavl, on the banks of the Volga; and here occurred the last difficulty of any account.

Yaroslavl proper lay on the further bank. On our side was a large village which forms the terminus of the railway; for there is no bridge over the river, but the crossing is made by a steam ferry. The river was solidly frozen on either side, but in the middle was a considerable ice-laden stream. A train would leave Yaroslavl for Moscow, they told me, at 10.40 that night. It needed

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immense efforts to get the baggage brought down to the river. There were no droskis, and no trucks of any kind—all had to be carried on men's shoulders, a distance of perhaps a quarter of a mile. Each man was the subject of a separate bargain, and some of them stopped half-way, put down their loads, and declared they could not get on unless they had more pay. With my extensive experience of the weight of each individual article, I knew well enough it was no excuse for this. A few dim lamps seemed only to increase the darkness as we stumbled along. At last I succeeded in getting my train of bearers down to the water's edge. At the ferry stage itself we were met by an ominous silence—the ferry had been stopped because of the ice. There was one rowing boat in its place, but this had just been taken by the Governor of Vologda, who was on his way to Moscow to attend the late Emperor's funeral; and, indeed, I could just hear the faint splash of the oars, as the boat made its way in the darkness among the ice.

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It was very annoying, for I was anxious, if possible, to take this train. I did not at all welcome the alternative of spending a night in a dirty "shebeen" on this side of the water. While I was standing, turning these things over in my mind, a voice sounded at my elbow, and a hoarse whisper fell on my ear. "I have a *lodka* (boat), a good *lodka*. I take you over; take you quick." It was an unpleasant voice, and I drew the man away into the light of a lamp that I might have a look at him. Ugly, slouching, drink-distorted, and cunning-eyed, he was a proper ruffian to look at, but he seemed our only chance. Now the proper fare for a passage was twenty kopeks (twenty cents), but of course I was prepared to pay more at night, and in view of the bad crossing.

"How much will you take us over for?" I asked.

"Six roubles" (12s.), replied the man.

"Too much," I told him.

"Five roubles. You pay five roubles, and I go. I go quick."

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I agreed to give him five roubles, and collecting the baggage—which was seized upon by various members of the crowd that had now collected—we marched off again for a point some quarter of a mile further down, where we found a long boat lying on the ice. The boat was launched, the baggage stowed, and, as we left, four additional men jumped into the boat. We had not gone more than twenty yards when the men stopped rowing, and the original villain came aft to me and said :—

“I take you now for fifteen roubles”
(30s.).

“You have agreed to take me for five roubles, and you take us for that, or not at all.”

“Fifteen roubles, because much ice, very hard work.”

I could see quite well that there was plenty of black water, and that as a matter of fact the crossing was not difficult, and I was quite determined not to play into these scamps' hands. I struck a match, and saw

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by my watch that the train would be off in seven minutes. It would be barely possible to catch it anyhow, but I must admit that the attractions of a decent hotel in Yaroslavl were pretty strong just then. When one is thoroughly in the swim of dirt and disagreeableness, one scarcely gives it a thought ; but now that one was washed, to go back, like the sow in the proverb, to the mire, or in other words to the zoological tyranny of a dirty drinking-house, would be doubly unpleasant. But an Englishman cornered is always an uncomfortable customer, and I had quite made up my mind not to pay the rascals a stiver more than the original bargain. So I made them put about, and then, when they began to realize that I really meant what I said, they reduced their demand to "thirteen roubles." But they were a horrid-looking lot, and I was angry and disgusted, so taking up one thing after the other I pitched them down on the ice, and left Hyland and old Sailor the spaniel to watch them while I went to find the

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police. I succeeded, after a long search, in finding the "police master" at the railway station, and with the invariable courtesy of Russian officials, he accompanied me back, dispersed the rabble that had collected, and had the baggage carried up to a tiny hostelry—not such a bad place after all, but alive with fleas.

On the following morning we crossed by the steam-ferry, which was again running, and were in Yaroslavl.

This town, which lies on the right bank of the Volga, is one of the oldest in Russia. The Volga itself forms from this point, as I have been told, an interrupted water-way right down to the Caspian Sea. The town was founded in the fourteenth century by Yaroslavl the Great. It is fortified with high and thick walls. The most interesting building I came across during my very short stay was the church of St. John the Baptist, which was built by Ivan the Terrible. It is a marvel of varied design, and bears a very strong resemblance to the famous church of

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St. Basil in the Red Square at Moscow. Whether they were built by the same architect, I am unable to say. There is, however, a story in connection with the Moscow church, which, if true, would make it impossible that the architect could have built St. John's in Yaroslavl at a later day. It is said that when the architect had finished the great church in Moscow, Ivan summoned him into his presence.

"You have indeed built a marvellous building," said that monarch. "What think you? Could you build another as fine as that?"

"Ay, and finer," returned the architect, pleased with the prospect of further chances for his genius.

"That you shall never do," was Ivan's answer, and he ordered the man to lose his head.

From Yaroslavl to Moscow, from Moscow to St. Petersburg, and thence through Germany to the British coasts—these parts of my journey home need not be here detailed.

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Nowhere in Russia did I meet with the smallest difficulty, for the officials were as courteous and obliging as I had always found them. Once over the frontier, and I had passed, by a transition so startling that it must have struck other travellers beside myself, from Muscovite into Saxon atmosphere, and all was changed. A single tunnel separates one from the other ; Russian ways, Russian dress, Russian tongue, and, alas ! I must add, Russian courtesy—all these suddenly cease. At the German railway station the officials worked themselves up into much excitement over the fact that my passport was not found correct. I was led before a magnificent-looking individual, who sat with his orderly at his elbow frowning and seeming fierce, and a conversation something like the following then took place.

“ You have no passport for Germany ? ”

“ I have not.”

“ Vat for you have no passport ? ”

“ I could not get one ; I have been in the extreme north.”

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"Vat for you come at all, and no passport?"

"I did not want to come; I could not help it. I was left on an Arctic island."

The poor man was very angry, and supposed I was laughing at him. Nor could I blame him for this—my reason must have sounded so strangely improbable. But with the help of my various papers I persuaded him at last, and he let me go with a "Bah! he is English," and a shrug most eloquent, that disclaimed all sort of responsibility for any such idiots.

CHAPTER XVIII

AFTER

BACK in England, and Arctic Russia a thing of the past. Removed from the petty worries of a difficult journey, it is easy now to retrace the larger and more general points of the impressions of that time. Although at first sight it might seem impossible in so short a time as the space of a few months to form anything like a fair view of people and things, yet, when it is remembered that the solitary circumstances of my travel threw me into unusual intimacy with the life of the northern peasantry, the attempt may perhaps be excused. And it is only of the northern peasantry, of the small traders, farmers and villagers generally, that I could make any claim to speak. Of

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the aristocracy of Russia, of the educated life, or, indeed, of Russian life at all, except in the half-settled north, I have only seen as much as many another Englishman. For the rest I believe the following to be a fair estimate.

To attempt a comparison of this northern life even with that of the peasantry in our remotest country districts would be labour lost. It would mean a consideration of influences and of traditions, the result of long and close contact with the *idea* of security in moral forces, which may grow in Russia, but are not theirs yet. In Arctic Russia, on the other hand, the native has always an object lesson in the Samoyed. To rise may not mean more than the acquisition of money, but to sink means to fall into line with the Samoyed. The Samoyeds he regards as his natural servants, and the fact that he is inseparably removed from them in class gives him position and a sense of superiority.

The majority of the Arctic Russians are able to read and write. Some cannot, and

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some Samoyeds can. But whether or no, the Russian by greater force of character is easily master of the Samoyed. Of late years the Samoyeds have been compelled to conform to the Greek Church; but they do so under compulsion, and my intimacy with them showed me very clearly that their hearts are with the Shamanism of their fathers. Their real attitude is that of trying to propitiate their god Nûm for an outward adherence to the God of the Russians, which they cannot avoid. Just as they talk Russian with the Russians, but the Samoyed tongue among themselves, so it is generally with their worship. And perhaps at the bottom of the Russians' moral superiority is the fact that their religion is the religion of the Tsar, their language his language, and the language too of trade.

There are two influences, and two alone, to which these peasantry defer in conscious responsibility; these are the Tsar and the Church. In a sense they are but one, for the Tsar is the head of the Church.

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The ceremonies of the Greek Church are exactly suited to the semi-Oriental nature of the Russians. The magnificence of its ritual, the grand effect of its vocal music (there are no organs nor any musical instruments in Russian churches), its many genuflexions, bowings and crossings,—these enable the worshipper to take an active part in the service, and yet entail no mental effort. The northern Russian is no theologian; he recognises little distinction of degree between the more popular of the saints, St. Nicholas, for example, and the Founder of his religion. But he does hold to his Church as a whole; the Church which has come down to him with its splendour of unbroken tradition he accepts, as he should, as containing the primitive unaltered faith inherited of his fathers.

The parish priests of North Russia are very distinct from those of the educated hierarchy, of the monasteries, universities, and Church Government. They are of the same social extraction as the peasantry among whom they work. There is further

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one point which tends more than any other to bring the Greek priests into ordinary social relationship with their people; and this is marriage. No man can be a priest until he is married, and this wise and common-sense rule determines, no doubt, the calm and gentle regularity of the life of the parish priest, which impressed me very much. The peasantry, as a whole, have the greatest affection for their "Pope" (as the priest is called), an affection which has its foundation in respect and not in fear.

Of the reverence with which the Emperor, their "Little Father," is regarded, there is no need to speak.

"Remember," one has often heard it said, "that in Russia a man fights because he is told to; he is the slave of an Autocrat. The result in war of this unwilling service must needs be very different from that of the enthusiasm of men who fight for a throne they love, and fight willingly."

There was never anything further from the truth, at least as regards the north of the country. Here, and there is little doubt

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everywhere, the Tsar is regarded with an affection and loyalty which can only be described as passionate. He is their father, the Head of their Church, the keeper of her faith and traditions. Every Russian is taught from his cradle, not that the Tsar is terrible and to be dreaded, but that he is good, and that he loves his children. This bears its fruit. Every Russian seemed to me to live under an abiding sense of the Imperial *presence*, so to say. I have put this strongly, but it impressed me so. As an illustration of this I may instance a trivial occurrence which I remember, on the frozen edge of the Arctic Sea. Inside our tent a braggart was boasting of his great strength; he had single-handed hauled a big seal up a high bank from the sand, and that is a severe task for any one; the man had been drinking a little vodka and was beginning to be a nuisance. Alexander the Russian, in a moment's pause, quietly remarked, "Our Tsar can pull a china plate in two," referring to the late Emperor, whose personal strength was great. This simple remark told in the

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(to me) most unexpected way. It was the most effective snub that I have ever seen delivered. The boaster dropped into instant silence; he could not be guilty of the irreverence of saying more; what was his strength beside that of the Tsar!

The character of the Russian peasant is a character of strong contrasts and contradictions that altogether defy analysis. But principally one is impressed by its extreme and childlike simpleness. The peasant (and here lies the attractive part of his character) is an overgrown child; in the simplicity of his enjoyments, in his wonder at new things, in his improvidence and *insouciance*, in his dumb obedience to the strong arm of physical power, in his very faiths and very superstitions he is a child. But secondly—and under all this—is a stratum impossible to define; he has the child's obstinacy, the child's inability to weigh conditions, and the child's want of self-control. At present the idea of any appeal from facts as they are simply does not exist. But it is not difficult to see that the day may come, perhaps must

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come, when the peasant will grasp the idea of individual responsibility and individual independence, which obtains more and more in western countries. When, from whatever cause, this principle has once been grasped by any mass of the people, one shudders to think what the result might be. And one most certain factor in this change must be that "Free Education," which even in Russia is now in the air. But no traveller can argue, from the character, at any rate, of the northern peasantry, and be a pessimist as regards the future of Russia. He will rather feel sure that fresh intelligence, while it may add to the elements that make for disorder, will act on the whole in the opposite direction ; that it will but fan into even a brighter flame the Russian's devotion to the Tsar to whom he owes it.

The Emperor of Russia, Nicholas II., deserves that it should be so. Following the traditions of his father, Alexander III., and of his grandfather, he has, by identifying himself with his people, already made himself justly popular. As a boy he was early

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distinguished for his quiet common sense and power of study. An "oomnitza"—a wise child—his tutor said of him to a friend of the author. Later on, when his father made him preside at the Council of State, he displayed most signal qualities of tact and temper. To these are due his popularity with foreign peoples, conspicuously with France, Germany, Austria, and England.

As President of the Imperial Commission to assist the peasants who had suffered from the famine of 1891-92, he gave evidence of that charity and kindliness of nature which afterwards, when he had ascended the throne, led to his taking very severe measures with certain officials accused of oppressing the poor.

In his simple domestic life, in his filial treatment of his revered mother, his manly bearing towards the friends of his boyhood, no less than by his general "level-headedness," he has shown himself worthy of the great position which he has been called upon to fill while still so young. And consider. He is truly an autocrat—on his shoulders

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alone are borne the affairs of that great Empire. And yet, such is the discretion of this youthful ruler, he has not so far made one false step.

For us in England his must always be an exceptionally interesting personality, for in a peculiar sense he seems to belong to us. Was not the scene of his early courtship little Walton-on-Thames? Is not his beautiful Empress the favourite grand-daughter of our Queen, and daughter of that Royal Princess whose death, noble in the pathos of its story, this nation will never forget?

That early and romantic love, crystallized now in serenity and strength, is indeed a happy augury for the future of Russia. Well is it that at critical periods in her development (and the present may be one) her destinies should be illumined by so admirable and ideal an influence as is this.

THE END.

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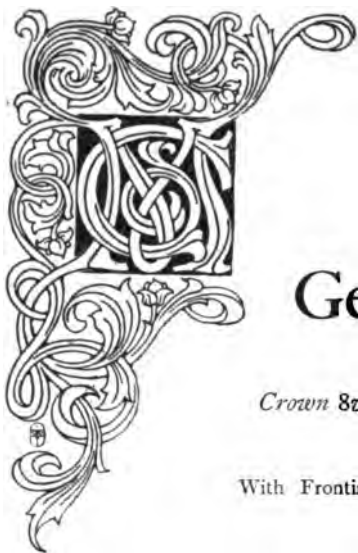
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